

THE AFL-CIO GETS ORGANIZED

October 30-November 12, 1995

# In THESE TIMES

the alternative newsmagazine

## FACE THE NATION



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Race relations after  
Louis Farrakhan's  
Million Man March  
BY SALIM MUWAKKIL



# EDITORIAL

## KEEPING CORPORATIONS ACCOUNTABLE

Conservatives, and many moderates, claim to oppose welfare because it encourages people not to work. These parasites, the argument goes, get something for nothing, while hard-working Americans pay taxes to support them. Indeed, Phyllis Schlafly recently said that welfare recipients in several states live so well that they have no incentive to clean up their acts and become useful members of society.

But even if we accept this dubious assumption, are these recipients the only freeloaders in our society? And is the amount we spend on them significant in the larger picture of parasitic practices from which we suffer?

These are questions that Ralph Estes implicitly addresses in "The Public Cost of Private Corporations," an important article from an unlikely source: the academic journal *Advances in Public Interest Accounting*. Estes' basic idea is a simple one: that while corporations pay the internal costs of doing business, they do not pay, or even calculate, the costs that their operations impose on society at large.

As Estes writes, corporate accountants meticulously calculate their internal costs, but ignore the "external diseconomies," or social costs, that their operations inflict.

These external costs are, in effect, "coerced assessments"—on consumers, employees, communities and society at large. In other words, we all pay for the damage corporations do while they deplete our commonly owned natural resources, pollute our air and water, generate mountains of toxic sewage and trash, produce unnecessarily dangerous products and destabilize communities, and charge us for their constant manipulation of public opinion and the political system.

To one extent or another, we are all aware of these corporate practices, but Estes has compiled the best available statistics to estimate the annual cost of these practices to the American people. Some of these are easily calculated, while others are extremely difficult to estimate, so his total figure is only a reasonable approximation—and a low one at that—because he excludes the latter group of figures.

The figure he comes up with is \$2.6 trillion (1994 dollars) per year, almost twice the entire federal budget, and more than 10 times the annual federal deficit.

This is the subsidy that the American people, involuntarily

and largely unwittingly, give every year to the corporations that rule over us. It is also an amount that in one year could pay the costs of welfare, now under bipartisan attack, for the next century.

These numbers may seem exceedingly high, but Estes uses the findings of official documents and generally recognized experts to compile them. Thus, to calculate the cost to the U.S. economy of disparate wage rates based on sexual and racial discrimination, Estes uses data from the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* and the *Economic Report of the President* and arrives at a figure of \$165

billion per year. Similarly, using standard techniques, he figures that the total annual cost to workers of death from workplace-induced cancer is \$278 billion. Furthermore, he writes, these estimates are only for workplace costs that have been studied. There are, for example, no estimated costs of serious poisonings of agricultural workers and consumers from carcinogenic chemicals, though these run up to 1 million cases annually. Using figures drawn from *Fortune* magazine, *U.S. News and World Report* and *Dollars and Sense*, he estimates the cost to the nation of corporate crime at \$165 billion. These categories alone add up to \$608 billion in annual costs to society, and they are only three of 12 that Estes discusses and calculates.

Corporations and their agents in the media and Washington extol the virtues and social contributions of the corporate system, while the public pays not only for their social irresponsibility, but also for the propaganda, lobbying and campaign contributions that enable them to corrupt our nation. And meanwhile, Republicans and so-called moderate Democrats bemoan the pittance that is spent to alleviate some of the evil corporate America does. In a democracy it is said to be people that count, but in our democracy it is money in the hands

of a few that has a stranglehold on government and the means of mass communication.

Still, our official and deeply held commitment to democracy offers a way to challenge corporate power. Despite the cynicism and demoralization now so widespread, a principled—and popular—politics remains possible. Indeed, it is absolutely necessary if we are to save ourselves and the nation. ◀

*Copies of Ralph Estes' article, "The Public Cost of Private Corporations," can be obtained from AU Media Relations (202) 885-5950. Estes' new book, Why Corporations Make Good People Do Bad Things, is scheduled for publication in January by Berrett-Koehler (415) 288-0260.*

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# InTHESETIMES

## CONTENTS

Volume 19, Number 25



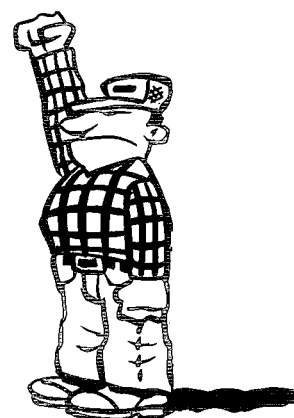
COVER PHOTO © 1995 RICK REINHARD / IMPACT VISUALS

## Face the Nation

*Reviewing race relations  
 after Louis Farrakhan's  
 Million Man March*

SALIM MUWAKKIL

15



## Getting Organized

*The AFL-CIO's Organizing  
 Institute offers hope  
 for American labor*

DAVID MOBERG

20

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### FEATURES

- The First Stone: Don't ask Dr. Science** • Joel Bleifuss.....12  
**Food first** • Christopher Cook and John Rodgers .....24  
**Viewpoint: Unbalanced economics** • Richard B. Du Boff.....28

### REVIEWS

- Film: *Theremin*** • Pat Dowell.....30  
**In Print: *The Careless Society*** • Catherine Tumber.....32  
***When Passion Religned*** • David Futrelle.....35

### DEPARTMENTS

- Letters** .....4  
**Sylvia** • Nicole Hollander .....4  
**In Short** .....6  
**Appall-O-Meter** .....6  
**Media Watch** • Jennifer Gonnerman.....8  
**Tomorrow's news** • Steve Brodner.....9  
**In Person** • Dave Mulcahey .....10  
**Etc.** • Joel Bleifuss.....10  
**Huge Mouth** • Peter Hannan.....13  
**Classifieds** .....37

# LETTERS

## Motown lowdown

It's unfortunate that your first coverage of the Detroit newspaper strike, "Showdown in Motown" (*ITT*, October 2), led with the image that management wants the media to lead with: the use of helicopters to airlift newspapers out of printing plants that have been blocked by mass picketing into the wee hours of the morning.

The helicopters, however unique and bizarre, are a ruse. They've been used twice—for a few hours each time—until the company decided it was time to run trucks through peaceful pickets. On the first occasion, at 3 a.m. on September 3, a semi crashed through a locked gate, threw a picketer up in the air and stopped only because it couldn't drive over the wreckage caused by the gate-crashing. The truck came to a stop within 20 feet of several pickets, some of whom would likely have been killed if it had kept going.

The second time, around 4 a.m. on September 10, the company decided to

run several semis directly into a crowd of pickets, injuring five of them. This corporate violence—the apparent willingness to kill people to get Sunday papers on the streets—and the economic violence the two companies want to impose on Detroit should be addressed in future issues of *ITT*. Moreover, anyone who has spent any time on the picket lines will tell you that renewed labor solidarity is another major part of this story that should be told by *ITT*.

For the past four weekends, thousands of members from the UAW, SEIU, AFSCME and other unions have loudly but peacefully picketed printing plants and distribution centers here—starting at around 6 p.m. Saturday night and ending around 7 a.m. Sunday morning. Each weekend Sunday paper distribution has been delayed up to 12 hours. It is a remarkable display of labor solidarity.

Michael Funke  
Detroit

## No surrender

The editorial reply ("Letters," September 18) that begins, "There is a great deal of evidence that the Japanese were on the verge of surrender" founders on the word "verge." Near the end of the war, an intransigent faction of the Japanese High Command posed a formidable obstacle to the emperor and to those military leaders able to accept defeat. That faction showed itself fully capable and willing to extend a verge to a ledge—and to make the ledge an interminable killing field.

Gar Alperovitz and Studs Terkel notwithstanding, as late as August, top Japanese military leaders advocated all-out resistance, including street-by-street combat by a conscripted citizenry, and, even after Hiroshima, held out the hope of eventual victory.

Stuart J. Silverman  
Hot Springs, Ark.

## Keep rolling, Stone

In her zeal to trash Oliver North's movie *JFK*, Linda DeLibero (*ITT*, September 18) ignores the contribution that Stone's movie made to our understanding of recent history. It was the public furor caused by *JFK* that moved Congress to pass the JFK Assassination Materials Disclosure Act in 1992. A review board of five eminent historians was created to review all previously classified documents relating to the assassination. As a result, researchers have learned more about the assassina-

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



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11-1

tion in the past year than they had in the previous 30 years. For instance, we have learned a great deal about the CIA's relationship with Oswald before the assassination as well as its extensive use of media propaganda assets to spread disinformation during the '60s.

There has been no comparable effort in American history to disclose so much information that goes to the heart of the intelligence community's records. In fact, what is shaping up is a battle between the civilian-controlled review board and the U.S. intelligence community. The FBI has already appealed directly to President Clinton to halt the release of more files, and right-wingers in Congress have attempted to cut off the board's funding—which runs out in 1997. We should all support the work of the review board if we care at all about the need for an open and honest government.

Steve Jones  
Landisville, Pa.

## Welfare for warfare

Joel Bleifuss ends the "Etc." column (ITT, September 18) on the Defense Export Loan Guarantee program—which provides new weapons funding for Greece and Turkey—with the suggestion that someone should remind the bill's co-sponsor, Sen. Dirk Kempthorne (R-ID), that the United States sent a cruiser to the Aegean Sea last November to help ensure that the two countries "did not start a small war over disputed territorial waters."

But perhaps it's already occurred to Kempthorne that after a nice little war in the Aegean, Greece and Turkey will be back in the market for more American-made weapons.

A. Rice  
Great Falls, Va.

## Closing the Web?

"Murdoch's web" ("Media Watch," October 2) overstates the likelihood that well-financed operations like News Corp. will monopo-

lize attention on the Internet's World Wide Web. Of course, it helps if Murdoch's Delphi service can pay for advertising on broadcast media. And yes, there are high-priced ways to advertise Web sites—but they are populated mostly by specialized high-tech companies and large corporations touting products.

To find news and information, most people rely on no-cost online alternatives: search engines such as Yahoo and WebCrawler, umpteen "What's new" and "What's hot" lists, announcement outlets such as Net-happenings, and Usenet postings. Paid listing services are relatively rare—and often are considered less credible than free sources as well as those reported on in magazines and guidebooks.

Case in point: Interested people see pointers to Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting's useful site through links from dozens of related political and journalistic pages. If progressives and activists work creatively online, the Web may remain a place where those who take the time to learn where to post appropriately—and how to promote sites worthy of attention—can gain large audiences.

Felix Kramer  
New York City

## Jobs for all

"Temping fate" (ITT, September 18) gives encouraging news about helping "temps" to organize at the grass roots. However, we need to look at the big picture. A basic cause of the squeeze on the worker lies in competition from low-wage countries. For instance, David Moberg, writing in the same issue ("Maquiladoras unbound"), notes that workers in El Salvador are being paid 12 cents per garment to sew a T-shirt that retails at the Gap for \$20. Even if groups such as the Southeast Regional Economic Justice Network are able to organize temps to obtain some basic rights, American contingent workers are simply participating

in a race to the bottom. It is necessary for all workers that some form of comprehensive national planning be devised that will provide jobs for everyone at a living wage.

The recently published *Jobs for All*, a short paperback put out by Apex Press, offers just such a plan. It sets out 11 principles, and includes proposals for the creation of jobs; raising the minimum wage; making the workplace more compatible with family life and women's economic achievement; improving employment opportunities for the disadvantaged; expanding workplace and civil rights; restoring public infrastructure; strengthening public finance; ensuring corporate accountability; and furthering environmental safety.

The chief authors of *Jobs for All*, Sheila Collins, Helen Ginsburg and Gertrude Goldberg, are academics as well as activists who have considerable experience dealing with government agencies and legislators. In addition, they have traveled and met with their counterparts in foreign countries.

In sum, it is necessary to work from the grass roots and plan from the top down. Eighty-four percent of the workforce is not organized. Thus a new labor organization based on the model of the American Association of Retired Persons might well act as a catalyst to bring in people fearful of being fired for joining unions. This would be a major step toward providing jobs for all.

Marjorie Hope,  
James Young  
Wilmington, Ohio

## Corrections

◦ The photo of Mumia Abu-Jamal on page 40 of the October 2 issue should have been credited as follows: ©1995 Jennifer Beach/Impact Visuals.

◦ The October 2 editorial incorrectly identified the congressional Republican who likened the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to the Gestapo. In fact, it was House Majority Whip Tom DeLay who made the comparison.



# InSHORT



Mexican President  
Ernesto Zedillo

## MEXICO'S DEMOLITION MAN

**D**uring this month's one-day summit in Washington, President Clinton and his Mexican counterpart, Ernesto Zedillo, tirelessly trumpeted the success of last year's U.S.-led \$50 billion bailout of the Mexican economy. "I can tell you today that Mexico is turning the corner. Fear has been replaced by growing confidence, and economic recovery is in sight," Zedillo told members of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce during a breakfast held before his meeting with Clinton. "The threat of financial insolvency that confronted us only a few months ago has vanished."

"Mexico's early payment of \$700 million serves as proof that our actions were proper and that they will be rewarded," crowed Clinton, who has a clear stake in promoting the notion that Mexico will return to sustained economic growth by next year: What rests in the balance is not only Mexico's financial reputation, but also the credibility of all of Latin America as a fit trading partner for a 21st-century free-trade arrangement.

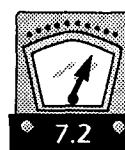
Critics, however, have blasted claims of economic "recovery" as illusions designed to obscure the underlying structural weakness of the Mexican economy. Amid their boasts about Mexico's early repayment, the two leaders neglected to mention that the U.S. Treasury had given Mexico a 90-day extension on the remaining balance of \$1.3 billion due this month. Carlos Heredia,



By David Futrelle

## No poor need apply

A British social fund designed to provide emergency financial assistance to the poor has been routinely denying requests for loans—



because those requesting the funds didn't have enough money. Over the past three

years, London's *Daily Telegraph* reports, nearly a quarter of a million applications for emergency social security loans have been turned down, because the potential borrowers were considered a bad risk to repay the loans.

## Not coming back

The makers of Capri Super-slims cigarettes might want to rethink their latest ad campaign. One full-page ad, found in a recent *Vanity Fair*, depicts a woman (presumably vacationing in Italy) alongside the unin-



tentionally dire caption: "She's gone to Capri and she's not coming back."

The Surgeon General's warning in the corner suggests some possible reasons why: "Smoking Causes Lung Cancer, Heart Disease, Emphysema, And May Complicate Pregnancy."

## Fan-tastical

Sometimes it's good to remember that the term "fan" originated in the word "fanatic," as some particularly devoted fans of the slain Tejano pop singer Selena have reminded us. The *Houston Chronicle* recently surveyed the opinions of those gathered outside the courthouse hosting Selena's murder trial. "I'm down here

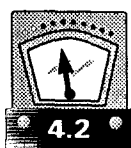


to show my support for Selena," explained Lalo Sandoval, described in

the paper as "a middle-aged fan." Sandoval called the chanteuse a "captain-navigator who turned the storm-ridden sea into a sea of peace and tranquility. She was very saintly—almost like the pope. You touch her hem and cleanse yourself."

## No treat

Fearing that their tacit endorsement of a holiday with roots in Celtic ritual might reflect a breakdown in the wall between church and state



(and encourage evil besides), school officials in Los Altos, Calif., have

banned Halloween. According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, some local parents believe it is wrong for children to disguise themselves as "dangerous supernatural creatures." But teachers still may be able to sneak a bit of pagan ritual into their students' lives, says one school board member. "Teachers can't tell students to draw a jack-o'-lantern, but they can have students depict their favorite parts of fall, which could include jack-o'-lanterns."

international program director for Equipo PUEBLO, a Mexico-based non-governmental organization, argues that Mexico's early installment is not indisputable evidence of the country's recovery. "Zedillo and Clinton are lying, and they know they are lying," he says.

Another red flag, says Heredia, who served as Mexico's deputy director of international economics in the mid-'80s, is the method Mexico used to raise the \$700 million it paid the U.S. Treasury. The Zedillo government originally intended to issue its own treasury notes—a dollar-linked debt instrument known as *tesebonos*—to generate the needed cash, but had to cancel the *tesebono* auction when Wall Street investors, skeptical about Mexico's financial solvency, shunned the new issue. Eventually, Mexico raised the funds in the European private-debt market. Heredia charges that these machinations amount to a "massive cover-up by the U.S. Treasury and the Mexican government to conceal the true situation of the Mexican economy." The principal goal of the effort, he says, is to make it "appear as if Mexico can repay the money it owes and the new money it is borrowing."

Doug Hellinger, managing director of the Washington, D.C.-based Development Group for Alternative Policies, agrees that the Clinton administration is "very dishonest" about what is going on in Mexico. The focus of Mexican officials on meeting the demands of their creditors may come only at the expense of social, economic and political stability in Mexico, Hellinger adds. "They are squeezing every dollar possible out of the economy to pay off the debt."

"With two out of every three enterprises currently failing in Mexico, unemployment soaring, wages falling and people falling deeper into economic insecurity and poverty," Hellinger says, "the sustainability of the real economy—an economy that both Mexican and U.S. policy-makers promised their publics was heading rapidly toward First World status—has already been demolished."

—Peter Zirnite

## OFFSET PENALTIES IN AEROSPACE

It's not just U.S. workers with few skills or little education who are threatened by the new global economy. Since October 6, more than 33,000 machinists at Boeing, the nation's leading exporter and the world's premier commercial aircraft company, have been on strike, primarily to win greater job security.

They have reason to be anxious. From 1989 to 1993, U.S. aerospace industry employment dropped 32 percent, a loss of 312,000 jobs. Boeing alone has eliminated 39 percent of its Machinists union positions, slashing 21,000 highly skilled jobs. Much of that loss resulted from defense-spending cutbacks and a slump in orders from ailing commercial airlines.

Workers for commercial airplane manufacturers such as Boeing have also suffered from international competition (especially from Airbus, the European consortium) and from a growing shift of production overseas. In order to win deals to sell planes, companies are often pressured—and willingly offer—to produce part of the airplane in the country placing the order. These deals, known as offset arrangements, are especially common when governments—such as Japan or China—have a long-term strategy to develop their own aerospace industry.

And offset arrangements haven't been the only factor driving aerospace jobs from U.S. shores. Aircraft companies have increasingly turned to low-

wage countries such as Indonesia and Mexico to make parts for their planes. They have even brought foreign workers to U.S. plants to be trained by American workers whom they could ultimately replace. Increased foreign competition and offset policies could soon lead to much deeper job losses—as many as 250,000 by the year 2000 and 469,000 by 2013, according to a study by Randy Barber and Robert E. Scott published last August by the Economic Policy Institute, a Washington, D.C., think tank.

Though Cold War military spending boosted America's commercial aircraft industry, current policy is schizoid. For example, the federal government guarantees loans even for foreign sales that include production offsets. By contrast, European and Asian governments are working hard to develop their capacity to compete internationally while keeping the maximum number of jobs in their home countries. The "offsets" that shift Boeing production to a country such as China are likely to enable new, low-wage competitors to gain an edge on American workers. In a global industry not governed by free-trade rules, guidelines for legitimate government action are unclear, and the U.S. government is least protective among all the major players. But pursuing low wages is not the only potential competitive route: With government support, Airbus remains competitive—even though the consortium pays its employees roughly 35 percent more than Boeing workers, who earn an average of \$20.23 per hour in wages.

Those good wages are not crippling Boeing. The company's productivity is up, executive bonuses are lavish and profits have totaled \$6.6 billion after taxes since 1988. The Machinists union recognizes that job security cannot be won exclusively in contract negotiations: It wants offset requirements effectively banned as unfair competitive practices under international trade law. The union also wants Boeing to give its U.S. workers a chance to bid on projects to keep them or bring them back to American shops.

Though health insurance, seniority rights and other issues are important, union spokesman Matt Bates said the "overarching issue" of the strike is job security and company policies that now "threaten the foundation of the aerospace industry in this country."

—David Moberg

## MEDICINE IN THE MARKETPLACE

In selling their controversial plan to cut Medicare, congressional Republicans have insisted that—without sacrificing health care quality—they will save money by funneling Medicare recipients into cost-conscious health management organizations (HMOs). Because GOP leaders have been reluctant to hold hearings on their Medicare plan, there's been little opportunity to honestly evaluate the merit of HMOs on Capitol Hill. But in California, residents were recently given a troubling glimpse at the bottom-line mentality driving the medical groups at the heart of the GOP's proposal.

Last month, a confidential business plan was leaked from the Southern California unit of Kaiser Permanente, the nation's largest HMO. To gain "rate advantage over its major HMO competitors in the market place," the 213-page plan argues that Kaiser must reduce its patients' hospital stays, replace specialized medical staff with lower-paid "multiskilled" employees, and limit the use of high-cost drugs (while increasing the use of inexpensive medications). "This is the type of rationed care people are going to get with the Medicare cuts Congress is talking about," said Jamie Court of Consumers for Quality Care,

## MEDIA WATCH

By Jennifer Gonnerman

Three years ago, when leaders of the American Medical Association (AMA) presented a plan to combat domestic violence, reporters from women's magazines were virtually the only ones who showed up. Robert McAfee, the AMA's past president, says that after the announcement one question nagged him: "What would it take to bring the men's print press into this?" In June 1994, he got an answer.

With the news that O.J. Simpson had long battered his ex-wife, Nicole Brown, reporters rushed to write about domestic violence. For perhaps the first time ever, the subject received simultaneous coverage by almost every major media outlet. "There was a ray of hope that these issues would be looked at seriously and continuously by the media throughout the trial," says Barbara Johnson, who is writing a book about press coverage of the Simpson case. But concentrated coverage of the issue quickly gave way to hotter topics such as speculation about Nicole's extramarital love life and prosecutor Marcia Clark's hairdo. Coverage of domestic violence "has since dropped off almost completely," Johnson says.

And there the matter stands. Local papers nationwide treat stories about wife-beating as if the crime were far less serious than assault by a stranger. Examples abound of how the press continues to bungle articles about run-of-the-mill domestic violence. In February—seven months after the Simpson story broke—the *Chicago Tribune* quoted a policeman in summing up a



story about a man who kicked in the door of his ex-girlfriend's apartment, then stabbed her 37 times. "It was strictly a domestic love thing," he said.

Seeking to ensure that local papers portray domestic beatings as crimes, not "love things," Johnson conducted an eight-month analysis of domestic violence coverage in the *San Francisco Examiner* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. She then informed reporters about her findings. "One of the biggest problems was reporters going to police officers for domestic violence information," she says. "Now they go to experts." Most newspapers, however, don't have the benefit of such educational efforts.

The good news, however, is that the Simpson case has prompted unexpected publications to explore the subject of domestic violence long after the initial media fascination evaporated. In a departure from its usual barrage of sports-hero adulation, *Sports Illustrated* published "Sports' Dirty Secret," a July 31 exposé about professional athletes who assault their wives or girlfriends. Recounting a press conference held by Warren Moon—football star and wife-beater—*Sports Illustrated* reporters blasted Moon for attempting to "trivialize his apparent efforts to strangle [his wife] Felicia by claiming that this was not a case of domestic violence but rather a 'domestic dispute' that had gotten out of hand." With that observation, *Sports Illustrated* sent a much-needed message, one that was made all the more powerful by appearing in a magazine with a massive, mostly male, readership.

the Los Angeles-based watchdog group that obtained Kaiser's business plan.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the Kaiser document, which outlines company strategy for 1995-1997, is its plan to link "physician bonus pay and leadership compensation to target achievement." In other words, doctors will receive extra pay for reducing the care they offer patients. In a separate 1994 memo, Kaiser offered its Northern California staff doctors annual bonuses of up to \$3,600 for limiting patients' hospital stays and avoiding expensive procedures.

Ironically, Kaiser is generally considered one of the more responsible HMOs in California. A 50-year-old nonprofit, Kaiser is facing stiff competition from for-profit HMOs that have cut costs even more drastically. In today's health care market, Kaiser's business plan warns, "current staffing levels and mix will not support business plans and strategies." The plan says Kaiser must "redesign jobs and process to lower total labor costs." Kaiser plans to shift work from skilled nurses to "patient care assistants." The report notes favorably that this "new breed of health care workers are non-union employees and may replace traditional union positions."

Speaking to the *Orange County Register*, Kaiser's Southern California regional manager, Hugh Jones, said, "There is not anything in the plan that is not legitimate, not responsible to the members of our plan." Jones defended the same-day release of patients undergoing gall-bladder surgery or a mastectomy. "That's high-quality," he said. "That's cost-effective."

And these aren't the only cost-effective measures Kaiser has been promoting. In June, Consumers for Quality Care revealed that a Kaiser facility in Southern California had instituted a new policy of discharging newborns and mothers just eight hours after delivery. The internal memo announcing the policy explained that it was necessary to "reduce our overhead costs and to remain competitive in a fluid marketplace." To persuade patients to accept the early discharge, the memo suggested that Kaiser's caregivers remind mothers that "hospital food is not tasty."

—Jim McNeill

Tomorrow's News Tonight

By Steve Brodner



# I N P E R S O N

## A NEW DIRECTION

*Jerry Tucker calls for American unionism to return to its roots*

point to the shop floor. Tucker, 56, who resigned as national organizer of the UAW reform movement New Directions two years ago to develop the organization's Solidarity Schools, is not simply mouthing platitudes: His innovative "in-plant" strategies, which call on rank-and-file workers to exploit their control over the production process, have produced the UAW's most stunning bargaining victories in the past two decades.

Tucker's embrace of the rank and file also owes something to his own disenchantment with Big Labor's hierarchy. Tucker's attempt in 1986 to run for a regional directorship in the UAW under President Owen Bieber—a man Tucker has likened to Stalin—was foiled by strong-arm intimidation and ballot-stuffing directed by Bieber himself. Tucker was only installed as Region 5 director after a lengthy Labor Department lawsuit.

A veteran of a General Motors shop floor, Tucker cut his bargaining teeth in the 1981 contract negotiations between UAW Local 282 in his native St. Louis and Moog Automotive, an after-market parts manufacturer. Although Moog had made a 38 percent return on the previous year's investment, it was demanding a \$2.60-per-hour wage concession from workers. As negotiations began, Tucker realized that the company was trying to provoke a walkout. "At the bargaining table [management negotiators] were quite open," recalls Tucker.

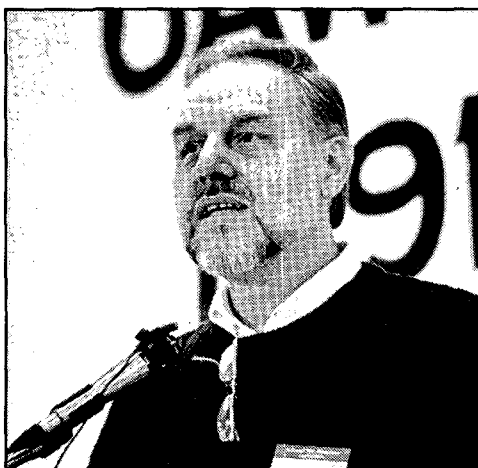
"They said, 'We dare you to strike. We've got 400 workers pre-screened to take your 500 workers' jobs.' I had to ask myself, 'Is striking in our interest, or is it a Samurai sword being handed to us?'"

Following Tucker's advice, the local chose instead to conduct an "inside" campaign of working to rule (i.e., following operational and safety regulations to the letter), filing mass grievances and other tactics calculated to slow down production. The inside strategy ultimately succeeded: After six months of diminished production, Moog not only dropped its concessionary demands but also agreed to a 36 percent wage increase.

This and another inside-campaign victory, at the Schwitzer cooling-fan manufacturing plant in Rolla, Mo., established Tucker as one of Region 5's rising stars. In 1984, he was promoted to assistant director of the region, with responsibility for eight states.

Tucker assumed this position at a pivotal time for the UAW. Claiming major sales setbacks during the early '80s recession, the Big Three automakers demanded in 1982 to reopen their contracts (which weren't due for renegotia-

Ask longtime United Auto Workers (UAW) dissident Jerry Tucker who he expects to lead the labor movement out of its decades-long slump, and he'll



# ETC.

By Joel Bleifuss

## Justice or just us?

Although O.J. Simpson may have got off free, the jury system that provided that verdict has come under close, and provocative, scrutiny.

Lapsed conservative Michael Lind, writing in the October 23 *New Republic*, argues that the United States should take a close look at European models of civil justice, where judges, not juries, determine guilt or innocence. Countering those who claim that the predominantly black jury in the Simpson case has rendered a rough measure of justice for all African-Americans, Lind notes that under the same judicial system white juries in the South effectively condoned lynching.

"The defects of our particular inherited structures of democratic and constitutional government may be mistakenly interpreted by an alienated public as failures of democracy and constitutionalism as such," Lind writes. "The result of such unwarranted but understandable pessimism might be support for plebiscitary rule in politics and, perhaps, vigilantism in law enforcement."

On the other hand, Paul Butler, of the George Washington University Law School, believes that the jury system has the greatest potential to provide real justice for African-Americans. Butler says that juries should consider, in some cases, acquitting defendants they know are guilty. In an article to be published next month in the *Yale Law Journal*, Butler makes a case for what he terms "jury nullification."

"At least when we serve as jurors we have real power to



disagree with what the government tells us justice is," Butler writes in the October 8 *Washington Post*, where he previewed the case he makes in the law journal.

Citing statistics that show one out of three young black men are in the control of the U.S. criminal justice system, and that more young black men are in prison than in college, Butler argues that for African-Americans, the United States is a police state. He writes: "When we thought of police states during the Cold War, we believed something was wrong with the notion of justice in those countries, not with the citizens. Black people are thinking the same thing about the United States."

Consequently, while it makes sense to protect public safety by imprisoning those who pose a danger to the community, such as thieves, killers and rapists, Butler argues that different standards apply to those charged with victimless crimes, particularly those involving drugs. "I urge African-American jurors to reserve nullification for these cases," he writes. "Half of the people in prison are locked up for drug crimes; nullification in those cases would put a huge dent in the prison population. Then, when we emancipate our brothers, we must engage in responsible self-help outside the courtroom as well."

Unless things change, Butler argues, America may resemble the Soviet bloc in other, more ominous ways. "If you keep locking us up, soon and very soon, we will go the direction of all the oppressed. You can put your tanks in the city square, and we will walk right up because we have nothing left to lose."

tion for another two years) and extracted major concessions. Ford and General Motors sought to erode future wage increases, while the deeply troubled Chrysler demanded wage cutbacks. All three companies changed work rules under the guise of labor-management cooperation schemes.

Disturbed by the UAW's concessionary direction, Tucker submitted to the union leaders a proposal for contract negotiations based on mobilization of the rank and file. In particular, Tucker argued, membership needed to be educated on how to resist the company strategy of playing locals off against one other to extract ever deeper work-rule concessions. Members should be trained instead to develop counterstrategies of their own, such as tracking and keeping a parallel inventory of a company's production systems. With such information, Tucker argued, strikes could be much more effective. To win valuable public support, Tucker suggested that unions also bargain for "community reparation responsibility provisions" that would require companies to compensate communities where plants have been closed.

His proposal circulated among union leaders, but it was never taken seriously. In fact, as Tucker continued his inside strategy in bargaining conflicts across the region, he encountered outright hostility from his superiors. In one instance, during a bitter inside campaign at LTV-Vought Aero Products Co. in Dallas, two regional UAW leaders went behind Tucker's back and made a concessionary deal with management.

Tucker was livid, especially since LTV was having severe production and distribution problems at that stage in the campaign. "We knew the company was hurting, and my 'colleagues' went out and surrendered." Rather than acquiescing to the secret deal, the local demanded strike authorization. A few hours into the strike, LTV caved in, retracting most of its demands and reinstating fired workers.

Tucker describes the LTV episode as the turning point of his career. Tactics such as a vigorous in-plant communications system, a solidarity committee and outreach to other UAW locals and unions had proved effective. But more importantly, UAW leadership had proved unwilling to embrace new strategies.

Recently, Tucker has been bringing his message to other international unions. Since 1992, he has been a close adviser to members of United Paperworkers Local 7837 in Decatur, Ill., who have been locked out for more than two years by the A.E. Staley Co. Like many of the other locals Tucker has advised, the Staley workers were seemingly being lured into a strike. With Tucker's guidance, the Staley workers developed their own inside campaign.

The experience of the Staley workers has borne out the strengths of what Tucker calls "solidarity unionism." Facing great hardship and nearly impossible odds, Staley workers have not only withstood the lockout, but they have made their struggle into a cause célèbre for the labor movement. Their tenacity, Tucker stresses, results from the local autonomy and self-reliance that has characterized their campaign from the start. "Without that period of self-discovery, when they worked without a contract for 10 months, it's not likely that this struggle would be alive today."

As the AFL-CIO emerges from its first-ever open presidential election, progressives are hoping that labor will summon the strength to renew itself as a leading force in American politics and the world economy. For his part, Tucker again calls for the movement to return to its roots: "To win today's struggles, leaders must derive their power from an educated and mobilized rank and file."

—Dave Mulcahey

# THE FIRST STONE

## WITH SCIENCE ON THEIR SIDE

By Joel Bleifuss

Corporate America, building upon its control of the national economy, the electoral system and the mass media, is set to acquire its next major property: the world of science. Business propagandists understand that with science on their side they can drown out environmentalists, sow confusion among the public and thus curtail the growth of ecological awareness.

And ecological awareness is, as Brian Tokar, writing in *Z* magazine, aptly put it, "one of the last internal obstacles to the complete hegemony of transnational corporate capitalism." *O'Dwyer's PR Services*, though viewing the situation differently, knows what's at stake: Public perception of the environment is "the life-and-death PR battle of the 1990s." Elizabeth Whelan, director of the industry-funded American Council on Science and Health, is armed and ready. According to Whelan, in this PR battle there are two kinds of science: the sound, sensible, all-American variety, and "mouse terrorism," which posits that any chemical that kills a rodent is harmful to humans.

Whelan, a widely quoted science "expert" funded by the Chemical Manufacturers Association and other corporate interests, is not alone in her crusade against public-interest "terrorists." In 1993, Garrey Carruthers founded the Advancement of Sound Science Coalition to aid "corporations or industry groups that are confronted by unsound science." Carruthers, a former Republican governor of New Mexico, argues that "science used to guide public policy decisions should be based on sound principles, not on emotions and beliefs considered by some to be politically correct." One of the missions of groups such as Whelan's and Carruthers' is to convince the media that environmentalists are motivated solely by politics and that industry is driven by rational science. "We need to be deeply concerned about the welfare of our families when public health policy is set not by scientists but by political operatives and special interests with axes to grind and agendas to fulfill," writes Whelan.

Not surprisingly, the corporate press is particularly amenable to such persuasion. Citing statistics from Whelan's group, a September 1994 *Fortune* magazine article

warned that "America's environmental policy-making has increasingly been driven more by media hype and partisan politics than by sensible science." *Fortune's* Ann Reilly Dowd reassured readers: "Despite the waves of panic that roll over America each year, some 500 scientists surveyed by the American Council on Science and Health have concluded that the threat to life from environmental hazards is negligible." And in truth, the American Council on Science and Health has little trouble finding 500 scientists to back up its pro-industry propaganda. Scientific research is a largely corporate affair.

"Much of the science research in the United States is being done at universities

that are funded by corporations, or in the corporation's own research laboratories," says Joe Belluck, a staff attorney at Public Citizen's Congress Watch. "Further, the only way to develop your status as a scientific expert is to get your research published and peer-reviewed by other experts whose careers, in turn, depend upon corporations."

Harvard University, America's pre-eminent institution of higher learning, is a leader in providing academic research to the corporate community. As Lawrence Soley reports in his recently released book *Leasing the Ivory Tower*, Harvard's Institutes of Medicine is establishing a research center in which university scientists will work side by side with their corporate counterparts. In fact, corporate offices will occupy four of the center's 10 floors.

With a weak-willed president and a Republican-dominated Congress, corporate-sponsored science is exercising unprecedented influence in Washington. Michael Kehs of Burson-Marsteller, the world's largest environmental PR company, celebrated the election of Gingrich and company in last February's issue of *O'Dwyer's PR Services*. "Greenies appeared to be in control when President Clinton played sax at the first-ever environmental inaugural ball. Today, however, the business community enjoys the upper hand," Kehs told *O'Dwyer's*. "Today there is a new contract on the street. And although the word 'environment' is never mentioned, many observers believe it's less a Contract with America than a contract on environmental busybodies."

The Republicans have made good on that contract. Under legislation passed by the House and pending in the Senate, all new environmental and public safety regulations must undergo a risk assessment and a cost-benefit analysis, both of which will be conducted by panels of experts that include scientists from affected industries.

Formerly established legislative safeguards are also under attack. Last month, in an effort to derail the planned phase-out of ozone-destroying chlorofluorocarbons, a House science subcommittee held hearings on the "myths and realities" of ozone depletion. One of the Republicans' experts was Fred Singer, an ozone-hole skeptic whose last peer-



reviewed work on ozone was published in 1971.

Rick Hind, the legislative director of the Greenpeace toxic campaign, finds the Republicans' search for pure science disingenuous. "The only sound science is in the sound studios of bands like the Rolling Stones and REM; otherwise it is a very subjective thing," says Hind. "Capitol Hill Republicans say they want sound science, but at the same time they're calling for companies to have representatives on the risk-assessment panels that set standards for their industry. Ironically, that's already the case. The Republicans would only make it worse."

A 1989 report from the Senate subcommittee on toxic substances expressed concerns about the EPA scientific advisory panel (SAP) that reviewed the pesticide Alar: "The fact that seven out of the eight members of the Alar SAP did consulting for the chemical industry while they served on the SAP certainly gives the appearance of bias." The report concluded that the "EPA must re-examine its conflict-of-interest regulations to ensure that the American people are guaranteed scientific judgments made by a clearly unbiased panel."

Nobody listened then. Nobody is listening now. In this respect, the Clinton EPA is no different than its predecessor. Take the current wrangling over how to regulate dioxin, the most hazardous industrial byproduct known to humans.

The EPA's Science Advisory Board is currently reviewing the agency's much-delayed dioxin reassessment. Of particular interest are two scientists chosen by the EPA to serve on the board's 25-member health panel: William Greenlee, of the University of Massachusetts at Worcester, and John Graham, who is with the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis. Greenlee and Graham were put in charge of critiquing the section of the risk assessment that dealt with the question of what quantity of dioxin is "safe." According to a Greenpeace report, sources within the EPA have told the environmental group that Greenlee and Graham "are the two members of the ... health panel who most actively and consistently challenged the validity of the dioxin health-risk conclusions contained in the EPA [reassessment] report." Not surprisingly, the careers of these two scientists are heavily financed by dioxin-creating industries.

Greenlee admits as much. At the May meeting of the Science Advisory Board, members of the board's health panel were asked to disclose research grants in dioxin-related fields. According to transcripts of that meeting,

Greenlee stated, "In addition to funding from [the National Institutes of Health], I have received research grants from the American Forest & Paper Association and General Electric, and I've also received gifts for research from the Chemical Manufacturers Association and Dow Chemical." Greenlee never explained what "gifts for research" entail. He also went on to say, "Those of us for whom dioxin supports our family, sometimes we keep looking for problems that aren't necessarily there because it puts food on the table." And what good food that must be. The total of the gifts and grants that Greenlee has received from Dow Chemical, the American Forest & Paper Association and the Chemical Manufacturers Association exceeds several million dollars.

Graham's Harvard Center for Risk Analysis is also heavily dependent on the corporations that release dioxin into the environment. In April, a month before the EPA's Science Advisory Board meeting, his center organized a conference on drinking water and health risks for the Chemical Manufacturers Association and the Chlorine Chemistry Council, a subgroup of the CMA established to deal with the dioxin issue. Graham has also received funding from a host of companies with a stake in the dioxin reassessment, including CIBA-GEIGY, Du Pont, General Electric, Georgia-Pacific, Hoechst-Celanese, ICI, Kodak, Monsanto and Olin. To top it all off, between 1990 and 1994, the center received

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unrestricted grants of unknown amounts from Dow Chemical, the company that Greenpeace characterizes as "the world's largest root source of dioxin."

And while Graham and Greenlee were taking command of the Science Advisory Board health panel, two other members of the panel, Frederica Perera, a professor of environmental health sciences at the Columbia University School of Public Health, and Ellen Silbergeld, an epidemiologist at the University of Maryland, recused themselves from the dioxin-in-review process because of quite different conflicts of interest. Perera is a board member of the Natural Resources Defense Council and Silbergeld is a former staffer for the Environmental Defense Fund.

Outside lobbying against EPA's dioxin reassessment has been organized by Environ Corp., a risk-assessment firm based in Arlington, Va. In 1993, the American Forest & Paper Association hired Environ to assemble a group of scientists that would criticize the EPA's reassessment. With financing from the American Forest & Paper Association, this "expert" panel, known as the Expert Panel on Dioxin Risk Characterization, took out full-page ads in *Roll Call*, the Capitol Hill weekly. In bold letters their ad raised the question: "Is EPA's dioxin reassessment adequately supported by sound science?" The ad then went on to provide the panel's answer: "We do not believe there is sufficient scientific evidence to support" any such reassessment.

Many news organizations are taken in, or are at least confused, by such mustering of tenured skills. In particular, the print media, with its incestuous ties to the paper industry, seems unable to examine dioxin fairly. A case in point is the *New York Times'* Keith Schneider, who has consistently downplayed dioxin's dangers. In fact, his predecessor at the *Times*, Philip Shabecoff, who was ousted for being too green, describes Schneider's "retrograde" work on dioxin as "bad reporting, just replete with errors."

One of Environ's paid anti-EPA experts was Donald R. Mattison, who, when not consulting for industry, serves as dean of the School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh. Nonetheless, earlier this year Mattison was selected to chair the National Resource Council committee that is studying the health effects of waste incineration for the EPA. Incinerators are the primary source of dioxin released into the environment, particularly when those incinerators burn polyvinyl chloride plastics.

Meanwhile, at the same time that Environ was attacking the EPA, the agency hired the company to do the risk assessment for the problem-plagued WTI incinerator in East Liverpool, Ohio.

And how has EPA Administrator Carol Browner responded to the growing influence of corporate science on the agency's policy-making process? With the same resolve as her weak-kneed commander in chief. One of her first acts on taking office was to recuse herself from any dealings with the WTI waste incinerator. After all, her husband was once a health care staffer at Citizen Action, and Citizen Action's Ohio affiliate is opposed to WTI.





# Face the Nation

**E**

*The Million Man March has forced a reassessment of Louis Farrakhan's significance in the post-civil rights era.*

By Salim Muwakkil  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Early on August 28, 1963, I joined a few friends from northern New Jersey for a trip down the turnpike to Washington, D.C., where, rumor had it, thousands of women would be assembled. Those rumors were correct, and when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. made his historic "I Have a Dream" speech, I was busy with other concerns; I missed the moment. But despite my lack of attention, the 1963 march on Washington had an indelible effect on my political consciousness. The spirit of camaraderie and common purpose I felt that day still tempers my occasional bouts of pessimism.

I went to Washington again this month for the Million Man March, and the event's purpose was underlined by a sad realization: I'm the last one left alive of the five friends who made the '63 trip. All of them fell victim to one of black America's contemporary plagues, afflictions so

dire that even moderate voices are shouting about our "endangered" status.

Concerns about that status and its implications propelled hundreds of thousands of black men to gather in front of the nation's capitol on a chilly Monday in mid-October. The huge gathering shocked many Americans into recognizing that an enormous racial rift still divides the country.

Already alerted to this rift by the racially disparate responses to the verdict in the O.J. Simpson trial, many Americans took the Million Man March as an indication of just how wide the chasm has grown. While mainstream pundits fulminated over the prominence of Minister Louis Farrakhan in the event and urged abstention for that reason, they were resolutely ignored by the black men who poured into the city from across the country.

The controversial leader of the Nation of Islam (NOI) conceived the idea for the march (though he regularly referred to Allah as the ultimate inspiration). Farrakhan first broached the notion of a million man march during a 1994 meeting convened by the Rev. Benjamin Chavis, then executive director of the NAACP. Dubbed the National African-American Leadership Summit (NAALS), the '94 meeting was Chavis' attempt to implement ideas of "operational unity" long espoused by black leaders; that is, organizing the integrationist and nationalist strands of the black movement on specific issues that affect the larger African-American community. Chavis initiated the summit process before he was fired from the venerable civil rights group in August '94. After his dismissal, he channeled the widespread interest in the summit concept by instituting the NAALS as a permanent organization.

So while the march owed its conceptual existence to Farrakhan, the event itself was actually organized under the auspices of the NAALS and its Million Man March Committee. The success of the event represents a victory for Chavis' notion of operational unity. Included among the march's organizers were adherents of several schools of thought; black nationalists worked with mainstream politicians and integrationists, while Muslims collaborated with Christians and assorted non-believers.

But the remarkable size of the event is largely a function of Farrakhan's leadership and his undeniable gravitas in the black community. And so the march has forced a reassessment of Farrakhan's significance in the post-civil rights era. No other black leader in the country could have supplied both the organizational discipline and emotional inspiration provided by the NOI's head man. For several years Farrakhan has been addressing male-only rallies in packed venues across the country. With his uncompromising message of moral rectitude and self-discipline—some would say,

despite this message—the fiery 62-year-old is alone among contemporaries in attracting the attention of black youth. Farrakhan's voice is among the most sampled sounds in hip-hop music, and members of America's most notorious black street gangs speak of him in reverential tones. Farrakhan speaks like no other leader to the rage of a generation of black men that feels abandoned by the inadequate integrationist agenda of the civil rights movement.

But Farrakhan's appeal extends far beyond alienated black youths. Some of the men on the mall fit that profile, but most did not. The crowd was vast and diverse, buoyant but orderly. The odd assortment of fringe groups often found at Farrakhan's events was there: Ardent acolytes of the late black nationalist Marcus Garvey were well-represented, as were members of the Five Percent Nation—a mushrooming New York-based offshoot of the NOI. Allah's Black Army, black uniforms sprinkled with silver studs, set up shop just east of the reflecting pool. And a few feet in front of them a contingent of Rastafarians unfurled a banner proclaiming the late Haile Selassie's divinity. A group of austere men in Islamic skullcaps and African dashikis held up a sign announcing "Orthodox Muslims in Praise of Farrakhan." These exotic fringes seldom find common cause under any rubric. But Farrakhan's appeal to self-sufficiency, his insistence that black male agency can make a difference in reversing the decay of the African-American community, brought them together.

Fraternity was the reigning spirit, and warm embraces were the preferred greeting. Many men openly wept. The gathering spanned every conceivable spectrum—class, color, religion, political ideology, gang affiliation, even gender. A large number of black women decided to join the march, and there were occasional white faces as well. In an event intended for black men, these self-defined outsiders were treated with respect and, according to one white participant, even some deference.

"So far, most of the brothers have been pretty respectful, and many are saying, 'Welcome, sister,'" said Sylvia Foster, a black woman from Boston. "And even the ones who are against me being here are respectful." Sensing the march's historic significance, Foster disregarded instructions not to attend. "I didn't want to be left out," she explained.



Louis Farrakhan at the Million Man March

Claire Simmons of Chicago said she came "because Farrakhan said we couldn't come." Simmons traveled to Washington on a bus chartered by her Baptist church. She was convinced the event had little to do with Farrakhan. "He was just a catalyst and a minor figure at that," she insisted.

Black feminists long have criticized the NOI's cultural conservatism and its veneration of a patriarchal order. Julianne Malveaux, economist, author and Pacifica Radio talk-show host, questioned what she called the "macho assumptions" implicit in the demonstration. "Farrakhan's doctrine is just a dark-skinned version of the Christian Coalition's dogma, with some racism thrown in," Malveaux argued.

In an interview directly following the march's conclusion, writer bell hooks echoed Malveaux's point. "How can we teach and model for our children that patriarchy is a bad thing, when we adopt its very patriarchy and war-like sensibilities for our own models?" hooks asked. "Stevie Wonder was the only speaker to mention the word 'love.' Everyone else was on a war-like and militaristic footing."

Though Farrakhan still provokes much criticism within the black community, his popularity among

© TED GRAY

African-Americans has nonetheless risen steadily in recent years. And his growing appeal seems to coincide closely with the accelerating spiral of decay in black communities across the country.

"I'm here in part because of goals of self-reliance, fraternity and responsibility," explained Morris Wilson, a Harlem resident. "But one of the main reasons I'm here is to demonstrate my support and respect for Louis Farrakhan, who's been out here urging us to be more productive for many years but who has only received criticism for his efforts." Wilson said the sheer magnitude of the march should convince anyone that Farrakhan is indeed a force with which to be reckoned.

But others were more circumspect. "Farrakhan wasn't the only reason for this march's success," said noted lecturer and peace activist Dick Gregory during an interview at the event. "Newt Gingrich, 'Uncle' Clarence Thomas and the mean-spirited forces they represent did just as much to pull these thousands of black folks here as the minister did."

As if in response to Gregory's comments, the crowd spontaneously began chanting "No To Newt!" Throughout the long day, chants denouncing Gingrich, Thomas, Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC), radio talk-show host Rush Limbaugh

and former LAPD Detective Mark Fuhrman occasionally rolled across the huge crowd. But by far the most popular crowd chant was "We Want Farrakhan!"

Questions about the NOI leader's anti-Semitism were dismissed by many participants as irrelevant. "These people aren't here about any so-called anti-Semitism or anti-white-ism," said Andre Taylor of Tampa Fla., who attended the march with his three sons. "Farrakhan talks to us about our power and potential that's innate but inactive. That's what makes us flock to him; he talks to that part of us that can change things but is too scared to try." The "fire-on-the-block" metaphor, as described by Taylor, was a common theme: "The black community is on fire, and we don't care about the pedigree of the person who can extinguish the fire," Taylor said. "When it's out, we can discuss that issue. But right now, we have too little time for diversionary discussions."

Indeed, the black community feels a sense of urgency to which mainstream America seems impervious. While research data detail a black world on the verge of cataclysm, Republican leaders are gleefully shredding the social safety net. Even the most myopic legislator can read the litany of negative statistics that outline black men's peril; in every index, from cradle to grave, they are ranked lowest. African-American men are the only U.S. demographic group that can expect to live shorter lives in 1994 than they did in 1980. In fact, an oft-cited study by physicians at New York's Harlem Hospital found that black men in today's Harlem are less likely to live to age 65 than men in Bangladesh.

Many of the march participants attributed the large turnout and strong spirit to the extreme dimensions of the crisis confronting black America. Steve Reed is a Washington native and a Vietnam veteran who also attended the '63 demonstration. "I've seen demonstrations come and go, but never before have the black people of Washington been as enthusiastic about a demonstration as they are now." He attributed that to Farrakhan's "focus on the least of us," that is, the black people largely lumped in the category of "underclass." Reed says disenchanted black youth respect the NOI leader because "they think he respects them. None of our other leaders even looks their way and would run away if they were to approach."

Despite all the warning signs of racial crisis, many white Americans apparently are convinced that we now live in a color-blind society. The U.S. Supreme Court is making that notion law with a series of rulings that question the constitutionality of established remedies such as affirmative action and black majority electoral districts. And, many reason, if African-Americans are having problems adjusting to this race-neutral environment, perhaps it's the content of their chromosomes (cf. *The Bell Curve*) or their culture (cf. *The End of Racism*). It seems certain that white America is less concerned with finding root causes for the crisis than with evading all responsibility for the legacy of the country's racist past.

This posture of malignant neglect helps to explain Farrakhan's growing appeal in the black American mainstream. African-Americans have always turned inward when the white mainstream turned away from their concerns. When whites tired of Reconstruction's attempts to foster racial justice in the 1880s, Bishop Henry Turner sparked "Africa Fever" in many black communities with his talk of repatriation to Africa. By the 1890s, when lynching was all the rage and the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* Supreme Court ruling gave legal sanction to American apartheid, thousands of blacks were lending their support to Booker T. Washington's ideas of self-help and cultural development. When black veterans returned from World War I to the racist violence of the "Red Summers" and the rancorous 1920s, black nationalist Marcus Garvey created the largest black organization in U.S. history—the Universal Negro Improvement Association.

Farrakhan is in that nationalist tradition. Born Louis Eugene Wolcott on May 11, 1933, Farrakhan was recruited into the NOI by Malcolm X in 1955. He rose rapidly through the ranks and, after Malcolm's 1965 assassination, Farrakhan assumed Malcolm's former position, becoming national spokesman of NOI patriarch and "Messenger" Elijah Muhammad. Suspicions have long shadowed Farrakhan about his possible role in Malcolm's assassination, but a reconciliation last spring with Malcolm's widow, Betty Shabazz, has served to quiet those suspicions.

When Messenger Muhammad died in 1975, Farrakhan initially expressed fealty to Muhammad's son, Warith Deen Muhammad. But when it became clear that the younger Muhammad was altering the black nationalist content of the group and bringing it in greater accord with the orthodox tenets of Islam, Farrakhan broke away to restore Elijah's black nationalist focus.

Farrakhan since has expanded his goals, broadened his associations and modulated some of the more inflammatory elements of the NOI's traditional doctrine. For example, Elijah Muhammad's central message—that white people literally are the seed of Satan—has been altered; it's the idea of white supremacy that's satanic, Farrakhan now argues, not the people expressing that idea. "When you're a baby, you understand things as a baby. But when you become an adult, you need a new understanding," Farrakhan has said, explaining his new, metaphorical interpretation of NOI dogma.

But he also faces a dilemma. Until recently his legitimacy within the NOI had been based on his fidelity to Muhammad's literal message. Many critics within the Black Muslim movement already regard Farrakhan as a corrupter of Elijah's doctrine and thus not fit for leadership. A rival, Atlanta-based faction led by Silis Muhammad denounced the Million Man March, questioning Farrakhan's allegiance to NOI orthodoxy. Were Farrakhan to drift further away from the crude catechism of Messenger Muhammad, it almost certainly would provoke further rifts within the NOI.

Thus Farrakhan confronts a problem common to any



fringe leader making a bid for broader leadership; he risks alienating his core constituency. A significant amount of his support emanates from black youths who applaud his confrontational rhetoric. And a key part of Farrakhan's attraction is his ability to outrage; black youths are seeking an uncompromising voice in a social environment that seems increasingly hostile. The conciliatory and deliberative black leadership that lately has emerged from political and academic realms strikes few responsive chords among the hip-hop generation. The rhetorical fireworks launched by Farrakhan and his aides attract these youths like little else.

But the very quality that endears him to the hard-core elements of the black community alienates him from those in other communities who are offended by his scapegoating rhetoric. What's more, as his rambling two-and-a-half-hour speech made clear, Farrakhan relishes a kind of obscurantism that confounds conventional wisdom. His obscure numerological references, for example, are lifted directly from the book of Elijah Muhammad; it's a ploy designed specifically to establish his independence from mainstream expectations. While Farrakhan spoke at length about the numerological significance of the Capitol Mall during his speech, an even more comprehensive numerological examination of the Capitol was included in a booklet provided in some press packets.

One little-noticed event just prior to the march illustrated some of the obstacles facing Farrakhan's plan to translate his NOI affiliation into an enduring leadership role in the politics of race. Two days before the march, a group called Unity Nation organized a rally at a Washington, D.C., high school. The featured speaker at the "Black Holocaust" rally was Khalid Abdul Muhammad, the Farrakhan aide who last year was fired for making viciously anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic remarks. He shared the stage with Steve Cokely, famous for his allegations of a Jewish conspiracy to disseminate the AIDS virus. Muhammad's suspension from NOI leadership has expired, and he is back in the official NOI fold. But he continues to test the limits of Farrakhan's new, less confrontational posture. What's more, Muhammad has a significant following among those adherents of Elijah Muhammad who denounce Farrakhan's revisionism.

And Farrakhan himself has been reluctant to completely shed his caustic rhetoric. Just one week before the march, Farrakhan again used intemperate language in attempting to explain the context for earlier statements, referring to Jews and other minorities as "bloodsuckers." Certainly, in reviewing his history there can be little argument that he has scapegoated whites in the past; indeed, NOI doctrine declared that white people were created specifically to bedevil the planet. Nor is there much room for quibbling over his explicitly anti-Semitic references. But his is an evolving doctrine, and Farrakhan appears more amenable to reasonable critique than ever before. What's more, he is devel-

oping a new legitimacy that is not necessarily based on his devotion to NOI dogma. Still, he models his leadership on the style of the late Messenger.

Ultimately, the march contains critical lessons for American progressives. The unity so much in evidence at the event served as a striking counterpoint to the fractious political history of black America. It suggests that black progressive can move beyond the mistakes made in the 1920s, for instance, when W.E.B. Du Bois and other black leftists launched a vicious attack on nationalist Marcus Garvey. Du Bois later wrote that he deeply regretted the bitter division wrought by his ideological disagreements with the populist black nationalist.

In retrospect, it's clear that mainstream America also did everything it could to discourage and disrupt any attempt at operational unity between the two major strands of the black movement. The initial preoccupation of J. Edgar Hoover's FBI was not with the organized criminals of the prohibitionist 1920s; rather, he targeted Garvey's organization. In operations that set the mold for the later COINTELPRO campaign—which marked militant black organizations for disruption and "neutralization"—the FBI exacerbated the Du Bois-Garvey dispute. The pattern was repeated almost exactly during the period of discord between the NOI and Malcolm X.

Chavis and other march organizers are determined to prevent those hostile divisions from once again disrupting the black movement. This strategy need not preclude criticism, and even strong disagreement. In fact, supporters of operational unity insist that criticism is much more effective when offered within a context of dialogue and respect. In some ways, the march signaled the possible emergence of a new, post-civil rights leadership.

Intimations of that leadership shift were apparent at many moments during the march. Some of the crowd's most enthusiastic applause, for example, was in response to rival Los Angeles gang members who promised to make unity and community development their highest priority. Such aspects of the march were missed by most mainstream commentators, but they were extremely significant to the participants.

Many black activists with impeccable progressive credentials—Ron Daniels, Manning Marable, Cornel West, Rep. Ron Dellums (D-CA), among others—endorsed the march and yet criticized its leadership. Most left-leaning black feminists denounced the march, although significant numbers of black women, including, ironically, leaders of old-line black organizations offered strong support.

For me it was no contest. The march was an enormously satisfying event; part therapy, part mobilization. The sense of fraternity and common purpose was overwhelming, and I embraced everyone as if they were Edward Patterson, William Foster, "Duck" Givens and Richard Hudson—all of whom probably would have attended, had they survived urban America. ◀

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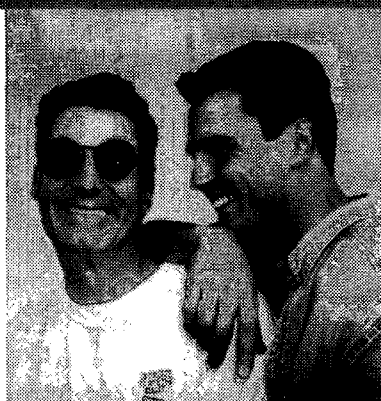
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**L A B O R**

# Getting organized

***The AFL-CIO's  
Organizing  
Institute  
could herald  
a new era  
of labor  
mobilization.***

**By David Moberg**

**S**

tuck in a managerial job he took to pay off college debts, 33-year-old Dave Johnson began to wonder about the purpose of life. "When I'm 85 and looking back," he reflected, "I don't want to say, 'What did I contribute? I just made a lot of money for some corporation.'"

He recalled his childhood in Minneapolis, growing up on welfare with his divorced mother, and hanging out with his black friends. Johnson, a cheerful and unassuming man with light blond hair, had gravitated toward business in college in order to make money, but his heart wasn't in it. A course on class analysis and critical theory finally "made sense" of the world around

him, he says. He thought his background could help him do some good as an industrial relations manager, but on that job he soon concluded that workers could only improve their lot by "taking action" on their own behalf.

Johnson decided to take action himself. He applied for a three-day training session offered by the Organizing Institute, a labor organizer training program funded by the AFL-CIO. "I just loved it," he said of the weekend he spent with 50 union members and college graduates learning the ropes of organizing. "I felt like a fish back in water. I could express my true beliefs and not hold stuff in." Later, after working three weeks as an intern on a campaign to organize asbestos workers in Milwaukee, Johnson was even more committed to his new career.

As unions steadily lose their share of the labor force and their power in the face of intransigent opposition from employers, becoming a union organizer might seem an improbable, quixotic choice. After all, for many years unions have spent an average

of less than 5 percent of their budgets on organizing (compared with more than half of their budgets in the late 1930s). In many unions, organizing departments are little more than patronage havens or dumping grounds for otherwise unwanted staff. Moreover, organizing is demanding work.

Nevertheless, since the Organizing Institute began operating in 1989, it has had remarkable success attracting union members and recruiting college students. Although it started with scant support and a small budget, the institute has had a dramatic impact in its first six years. It has provided differing degrees of training to several thousand organizers and nourished a new culture of organizing.

"Probably the most important thing the Organizing Institute has done," says Steve Lerner, the architect of the Service Employees International Union's (SEIU) Justice for Janitors campaign, "is to promote the idea that it's possible to win again. People had given up and thought it was hopeless to organize."

As founder Richard Bensinger originally hoped, the institute has begun to make organizing one of the central missions of the labor movement, rather than an often neglected enterprise grafted on to the main business of representing union members. Though woefully underfunded, the institute still has wide support. Indeed, both candidates in this month's election for AFL-CIO president, John

*As union leaders debated organized labor's future at this month's AFL-CIO convention, the six-year-old Organizing Institute was widely seen as a model of how labor can revive itself. This article is part of an ongoing series that examines innovative strategies to reverse the decline of the U.S. labor movement.*



Sweeney of SEIU and Kirkland appointee Tom Donahue, pledged to greatly expand the institute's budget. "There's nothing else under the compass of the AFL-CIO that's in the same league," says Paul Booth, organizing director for the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), which was among the five national unions that initially supported the institute. "Their material contribution is great—providing bodies with energy and skills," Booth says, "and their moral impact is great—inspiring and educating everyone."

The main work of the institute is recruiting and training labor organizers. Bensinger, 44, for many years an organizer for ACTWU (now merged with the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union into UNITE), conceived of the institute in 1988. He first found support from some international union officers such as Steelworkers President Lynn Williams and SEIU President Sweeney. Bensinger then moved on to win the support of Donahue (then AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer) and Dick Wilson (then director of the Department of Organizing and Field Services), while garnering a less-than-enthusiastic endorsement from then AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland. In 1989, the federation's executive council cautiously approved and provided a budget for a free-standing institute independent of normal AFL-CIO activities.

The distance was salutary: Throughout the institute's existence, many AFL-CIO staffers, especially from the Organizing and Field Services, have criticized and attempted to undercut the work of the institute, which they see as a challenge to their bureaucratic power and procedures. The institute's relative independence has helped it withstand those attacks. Moreover, explains deputy director Mark Splain, a veteran organizer for both community groups and the SEIU, the institute has emerged as a partnership among unions committed to organizing. Launched with a first-year budget of \$385,000, the institute now has a \$2.9 million budget and a full-time staff of nine.

Bensinger and other organizers like Splain have ambitions beyond the simple improvement of organizing techniques: They are challenging the labor movement to drastically change how it operates—starting with where the money goes. Some big unions spend as little as 2 percent of their budgets on organizing, and only a very few—like SEIU

and UNITE—spend as much as 25 to 30 percent. And local unions, which control much of the labor movement's resources, often do no effective organizing. One survey in the 1980s, when union strength was rapidly ebbing, found that only 194 of California's 7,000 full-time union employees were organizers.

"The labor movement got into a servicing rut," Bensinger says. "We mistake servicing [members' grievances] for power, but we can only service members if we get more power, and we can only get more power by organizing more of the workforce. If unions put 30 percent of their resources into organizing, that would change the world."

Even an extra \$25 a year from each union member, whether through new or reallocated resources, would produce \$375 million more each year for organizing, enough to at least maintain the current union share of the workforce. As unions won fewer representation elections over recent decades—dropping

from a postwar peak of around 80 percent to 44 percent by 1982—many concluded organizing was not cost-effective. But, as Bensinger notes, organizing gains power for current members and, by a narrower calculation, actually pays. David Kieffer, a former organizer with ACTWU, figures that dues money from new members in that union represents roughly a 20 percent return on the investment in organizing—though job loss to exports and capital flight has still undermined ACTWU's finances.

In 1971, at age 20, Bensinger was the head of his company's workplace committee in an AMF/Head ski factory in Colorado. When ACTWU moved to organize the plant, Bensinger became the head of the pro-union committee during a successful organizing drive. A union organizer since then, Bensinger is an energetic and sincere leader, whose bluntness is leavened by a lively sense of humor. His primary message to would-be organizers is that "we're not about selling a union. We're training leaders."

Applicants who make it through an initial screening attend a three-day training session. The key to that training—and to contemporary organizing—is simple and old-fashioned: the house call. In the house call, organizers encourage workers to talk about their jobs, discover their grievances, encourage them to think about what their rights on the job should be and ask



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them to join the union.

Bensinger cautions organizers not to beg or even persuade workers to join a union, and not to thank workers for helping or joining. Instead, he says, organizers should listen and then agitate, building on workers' anger while respectfully acknowledging their fears, especially of reprisals by their boss. Organizers should encourage workers to take action and convey the message that they are the union. Rather than doing a favor for the organizer by joining, they are doing a favor for themselves. It is a message designed to give workers a sense of power and, in the institute's favorite catchphrase, "ownership" of the organizing campaign.

Bensinger also tells his employees that the most successful campaigns act like unions from the beginning, recognizing that winning an election and a contract is likely to be a battle at every point. Organizers should form the largest in-plant committee of union supporters that they can and encourage that committee to do much of the organizing work. In many cases, organizers will use the power of this union-in-formation to force recognition through strikes, pickets or other actions, bypassing an election.

These tactics make a difference. When unions make house calls to 60 to 75 percent of workers, according to an AFL-CIO survey, they win 78 percent of elections. When they don't, they win 41 percent. When they have no in-plant committee, they win 10 percent of elections; a small committee leads to victory only about 27 percent of the time. But if the committee includes at least 15 percent of workers, unions win 61 percent of the elections. Partly as a result of such strategic changes, unions are increasing the rate at which they win elections; they are also organizing thousands of workers without holding elections. Indeed, after many years of decline and stagnation, the last two years have seen slight increases in union membership.

Yet Bensinger still cautions trained organizers to guide the in-plant committee and prod members to make house calls and take action even when they're fearful. "The only way people learn is through action," Bensinger says, recalling that the first time he and other workers stood in front of his factory's gate and handed out union leaflets, he was convinced they would be fired. "But only when we did it and didn't get fired, did we have power."

Some observers fault the institute for providing little education about labor history. Bensinger stresses education through action and focuses on role-play in the initial training sessions: New recruits act as "organizers," conducting in-plant committee meetings, or knocking on doors to talk to "workers" played by trainers or other students. Trainers often throw students curves: playing passive, contented workers, pro-union workers who are racially prejudiced, or workers who fear losing their jobs or have had past problems with unions.

The next stage of training is a three-week internship. Although typically only one-fifth of the three-day trainees continue with the internship, Allison Porter, director for

recruitment and training, says individual unions offer additional training for many of their members who, although they do not complete the program, may work as volunteer organizers once they return to their old jobs. Many student recruits get jobs that assist organizing campaigns from the inside before trying to become organizers themselves. In any case, plenty of jobs are available. In 1994, the institute graduated 155 organizers (up from 118 in 1993). But that was still less than half the number unions had requested.

During the three-week internship, students put their role-playing experience to the test. In Milwaukee, at the start of the asbestos-workers organizing drive in September, Juan Carlos Pons, 33, took to the road with trepidation and excitement, following his carefully marked map of the city. A refugee from Cuba, Pons had managed to sneak into the Carpenters union during Boston's '80s construction boom and enrolled in a labor studies program before applying to the institute. "It's like a magnet," he said. "I should finish school, but it seems like a perfect idea."

Pons' first organizing house call (to a man in suburban Cudahy) threw him for a loop. Though the man was on the state list of certified asbestos removers, he had become part-owner of a removal company. But Pons recovered quickly and talked at length with the surprisingly receptive boss about why there should be a union. The next stop was more promising. Pons talked with an industry veteran with a list of complaints a mile long about how the work has deteriorated in pay, safety and quality of workmanship. Pons was so excited that the worker had to ask him several times for a union card to sign. "I am tired, but I am pleased," Pons said, as he reflected on his first day, "but I'm not going to be so naive to think it will continue this way."

Other interns, particularly the women who were trying to organize an all-male group of asbestos workers, faced steeper hurdles. Rhea Laughlin, 21, a graduate of the women's studies program at the University of California at Santa Cruz, faced both condescension and come-ons. "I'd never experienced sexism to this degree or with this frequency," she said. But Laughlin managed to fend off advances and keep herself—and the eyes of the asbestos workers—focused on building the union. "The union is just the beginning of our struggle," she said. "I definitely want to do this work."

All in all, the interns were remarkably successful. At the end of the first week, four-fifths of the workers whom interns visited that week signed union cards. And a crowd of about 40 workers showed up at the first union meeting.

The institute's interns and trainees come from a wide range of backgrounds. Although union members constitute a growing share of trainees, the institute spends more than half its budget recruiting on campuses. Using a network of sympathetic professors and institute graduates, recruiters primarily look for students who have been politically active on a wide

range of issues from school budgets or Central America to feminism or racial injustice. Even at the elite schools, most recruits come from working-class and union families. The institute makes special efforts to recruit women (about 60 percent of graduates) and Latinos, Asians and African-Americans (about 40 percent of graduates), since polls show women and minorities are most open to unionism, and most unions lack female and minority staff. But without vibrant political movements generating would-be organizers on most campuses (especially blue-collar, commuter colleges), recruiting is itself a labor-intensive organizing project.

Even among socially aware students, "most aren't thinking of the labor movement when they think of making a difference," says the institute's Porter, who was a campus political leader in the '80s before she went through an early Organizing Institute training session. "We've got to build bridges from their issues to the labor movement."

About 60 percent of the Organizing Institute's three-day trainees have been rank-and-file members, nominated by their unions. Increasingly, unions rely on turning members into volunteer organizers as a key tactic. They know the job, know what a union means and can talk with authority to nonunion workers. This strategy threatens typical union hierarchies; teaching workers to be leaders shifts power away from union staff and into the hands of members. But this tactic also increases the power of the union by using its greatest untapped resource, its members.

The Organizing Institute can already boast many impressive achievements: luring students into the labor movement, graduating 560 well-trained organizers and providing less extensive training to more than 3,000 others. But the institute has also contributed something equally important, if less immediately tangible: It has quickly become the central catalyst in creating a new culture of organizing within the labor movement. It encourages organizers to share their knowledge, inspires unions to work harder and invest more in organizing, and (in a departure from the secretive and competitive way organizers from different unions have typically treated each other) nurtures a spirit of cooperation among the 16 unions that actively support its work.

Indeed, besides its central training mission, the staff consults with union locals and internationals that want to radically revamp themselves to step up organizing drives. The institute also brings together veteran organizers, elected local officials and other union staff. "It's a school for everyone, not just for young people," says former ACTWU organizer Kieffer, who worked with interns on the Milwaukee project. "The best organizers get to elevate their game."

Next year the Organizing Institute hopes to more than double its training, bringing 1,800 recruits to three-day training sessions and graduating 400 organizers. And, given the support of both the insurgent and old guard forces during the recent AFL-CIO election, chances are strong that the institute will play an expanded role in the federation. Already the AFL-CIO Executive Council has

approved a new organizing fund, starting with \$5 million in 1996 and increasing to \$20 million a year by 1999. To tap that money, international unions would have to put up \$4 for every \$1 from the fund. Several organizing directors, such as Bob Muehlenkamp of the Teamsters, hope that the Organizing Institute will establish the guidelines for allocating the money to guarantee that it generates new efforts to organize, not simply fund campaigns that unions would have undertaken anyway.

While there is widespread agreement that the Organizing Institute must grow, there are worries about how fast it can expand and how many new tasks it can take on without compromising the quality of its work. Even now, Muehlenkamp cautions that too many unions want the institute to assume responsibility for overseeing their organizing campaigns, threatening to divert its efforts from the core task of recruiting and training new organizers.

Bensinger, however, remains convinced that rapid expansion is necessary—and that the entire labor movement must vastly increase the scale and intensity of organizing. First, that means targeting large corporations (such as Wal-Mart), geographic regions or industries for organizing, rather than moving site by site. Such campaigns will require large numbers of new organizers, but they also hold the potential for inspiring more union members and outside recruits to join in organizing.

Second, a dramatically expanded organizing strategy will have to use direct action and civil disobedience where necessary, especially when the laws do not adequately protect workers' rights. "When an employer fires a worker in the middle of an organizing campaign, we have to guarantee there will be more than an unfair labor practice charge filed," Bensinger says. "We need to fill the moral vacuum out there with hundreds, thousands of rank-and-file workers. ... If some poultry plant or office wants to fire a worker, it needs to understand it'll face an unprecedented challenge from its area churches, consumers, community groups and stockholders."

With corporate hostility toward workers unabating and Republicans in political control, union advocates of other leading strategies such as labor-management cooperation and dependence on the Democrats are losing their credibility. "The systemic, strategic alternatives are largely not there," argues institute deputy director Splain. "What we're fighting is mainly accepting the status quo and letting [the labor movement] die while waiting for a pension." Moreover, as the bottom four-fifths of the American population lose ground financially during supposed good times, the potential for an explosive union drive exists. Increasingly, the mass, militant organizing route seems the best alternative to oblivion. "I believe the stars are aligned for a union resurgence," Bensinger says, eager for the fight. "Somewhere along the line, the labor movement lost its soul. But combine the anger of the working poor with moral authority and the power of labor, and you've got a movement again." ◀



**POLITICS**

# Food first

# W

*A new national movement is proving grass-roots work can be nutritious and delicious.*

**By Christopher Cook  
and John Rodgers**  
SAN FRANCISCO

W edged between a six-lane highway and a barren hillside, the beige buildings of San Francisco's Alemany Housing Development and their litter-strewn grounds have long been a familiar sight to passing motorists on their way elsewhere. Isolated from middle-class neighborhoods and the glitter of the city's financial district, Alemany's residents live without the conveniences that San Francisco's better-off citizens take for granted. As with public housing projects in cities across the country, the nearest "grocery" store is a cinder-block liquor and deli market a block away.

But in this community, long wracked by poverty and joblessness, residents have turned a blighted field into the nation's first urban

youth farm. Now boasting rows of organic vegetables, flowers and a greenhouse, the four-acre farm is a meeting ground for teen jobs, community pride and fresh, nutritious food. In newly landscaped backyards, Alemany residents tend six-foot-square planter boxes bursting with tomatoes, collard greens, red chard and string beans—an impressive display of produce often unavailable in low-income areas. Instead of sacrificing their tight food-stamp budgets to high-priced convenience stores or busing across town in search of a supermarket, Alemany residents—and people in low-income communities across the country—are gaining direct access to affordable, nutritious food by growing their own.

Situated about a mile from the Alemany projects in one of the poorest sections of the city, the office of the San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners (SLUG) bustles with energy and optimism. Teen gardening interns drop by to pick up paychecks and brag about their vegetable crops, or to prod Director Mohammed ("Mo") Nuru to give them more farming work. Once strictly a gardening

group, SLUG now promotes, with help from city government and foundation grants, small-scale urban agriculture projects such as the Alemany farm as a means to help develop economically depressed communities. SLUG's aim, Nuru explains, is not only to give summer jobs to kids or provide inexpensive produce to the poor, but to restore vitality to the community by directly involving its members in its welfare. "It's a whole cycle we're addressing," Nuru says, "not just one issue."

While local projects such as the Alemany farm encourage people to grow their own nutritious food, a wide array of other grass-roots efforts—involving sustainable agriculture advocates, urban redevelopment organizers and environmental activists—are working to open up consumer markets in the United States for small-scale, diversified agriculture. These groups argue that the extreme competitive pressure exerted by multinational agribusiness corporations has made it difficult to preserve community-oriented and ecologically conscious agriculture. As a result, both small farmers and poor consumers have suffered.

Under the banner concept of "community food security"—the notion that all people should have access to a nutritious diet that comes from ecologically sound, local, non-emergency sources—these groups have come together to form the Community Food Security Coalition, an embryonic national movement that promotes what co-founder Andy Fisher calls "a more democratic food system." The

*This story was made possible by grants from the Funding Exchange, which is providing support for a series on progressive groups that are pioneering new strategies at the grass-roots level to counter conservative and corporate influence.*

coalition links 125 groups—such as food banks, family farm networks and anti-poverty organizations—that have rarely worked together in the past.

And in a time when most progressive groups are retrenching, food-security organizers are literally growing a movement from the grass roots. Even as Republicans are slashing funds for food stamps and welfare programs, the coalition is poised to wrest promising, if small-scale, legislation from a conservative Congress. The Community Food Security Act (CFSA), a coalition-backed bill on the verge of passage, would fund local projects that are “designed to meet the food needs of low-income people, increase the self-reliance of communities in providing for their own food needs, and promote comprehensive ... solutions to local food, farm and nutrition problems.” Grass-roots programs would receive one-time seed grants to build self-sustaining economic relationships between farmers, food stores and low-income consumers. While the House version requests \$2.5 million, the Senate measure calls for \$4 million. Admittedly, it’s a paltry sum, but organizers point out that the bill provides an opportunity to expand existing networks. “We’re already investing time and money in making these things happen,” says Mark Winne of the Hartford Food System, a community-gardening and food-policy group in Hartford, Conn. “If you’re talking about putting just a little more money in to give it that extra push, I think it could go a long way.”

Similar government initiatives—better funded but narrower in scope—have already proved successful. In 1992, after decades of state-level experimentation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture authorized the Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) to supply fresh-produce vouchers to recipients of Women, Infants and Children (WIC) assistance. In three years, the program has issued vouchers to some 800,000 WIC recipients in 24 states, the District of Columbia and the Cherokee nation. In turn, these vouchers have been redeemed at hundreds of farmers’ markets that participate in the department’s demonstration program. However, these impressive aggregate numbers belie the minimal funding committed to the FMNP: Each WIC participant gets just \$20 a year in



**Residents at  
San Francisco's Alemany  
housing project display the  
fruits of their labor.**

farmers’ market coupons as a supplement to food stamps.

Nevertheless, according to Kai Siedenberg, coordinator of the California Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, 87 percent of the 6,615 farmers nationwide who have participated in the FMNP have increased their overall sales. And for many WIC recipients, it is their first entrée into the fresh-produce market. Tom Haller, head of the California Alliance for Family Farms, a group supporting sustainable agriculture and small farmers, says a survey by the alliance found that more than half of the WIC recipients involved in the FMNP had never been to a farmers’ market before starting the program. “Most WIC recipients didn’t know about it or didn’t think it was for them,” says Haller. But since entering the program, Haller says, participants have doubled their intake of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Just as the WIC farmers’ market program has begun to take root, however, congressional Republicans are threatening to cut it. In fact, while the CFSA seems headed for approval, various other federal food-access and nutrition programs are under attack. Republicans are pushing hard to cut as much as \$200 million from the WIC nutrition program. Meanwhile, the House Appropriations Committee has proposed eliminating the Community Food and Nutrition Program, a close parallel to the CFSA that distributes \$9 million a year to community-based nutrition projects serving low-income children. The essential difference between the proposed CFSA and already existing programs is that projects such as the Community Food and Nutrition Program focus primarily on food distribution. The CFSA, by contrast, places new emphasis on self-sufficiency.

The political uses of food self-sufficiency in a year of savage congressional cutbacks are not lost on CFSA proponents. “One of our fears is that the bill is going to be used as

PHOTO COURTESY OF SLUG

kind of a cover," says Ed Bolen, who monitors legislation for California Food Policy Advocates, a research and lobbying group. "If you're cutting food stamps but you can say you're funding this new initiative—even though it's only \$2.5 million—you can talk about how you're starting new initiatives." With a hint of irony, Andy Fisher observes that the GOP's drive to "downsize" government may bring unexpected support to programs like the CFSA. "People are looking to 'reinvent government' and to come up with new ideas. And that's what we're doing," he says. "In a way, we're using Republican rhetoric."

As more than one activist put it, the bill is sandwiched ever so tightly between a traditional entitlement approach and entrepreneurialism. While the bill gives grass-roots projects desperately needed seed money, it does not sustain them with a permanent subsidy. If the projects are to survive and thrive, they will have to support themselves. With markets tightening and public and private funding in rapid decline, this remains an unclear prospect at best.

Nonetheless, activists view the CFSA as a foundation upon which to build a lasting, broad-based network. Most government food-aid programs, like the stopgap homeless shelter approach, were never intended as a long-term solution to poverty and hunger but merely as a solution of last resort. "We've gone a little bit too far down the line in relying on federal food-assistance systems and emergency food networks," says Mark Winne of the Hartford Food System. "They don't provide a real opportunity for people to partici-

pate in solving their own problems."

The concept of a food-security coalition emerged almost simultaneously on the East and West Coasts in the '90s, as researchers and activists began to establish new working relationships between anti-hunger organizations, such as food banks, and sustainable-agriculture groups. Winne was building a nationwide network of local food-security projects that shared resources and ideas. Meanwhile, UCLA urban-planning professor Robert Gottlieb and researcher Andy Fisher were documenting the shortcomings of U.S. food policy—and the disjointed efforts by sustainable-agriculture and hunger groups to change it.

In a policy paper that would later become a cornerstone of the community food-security movement's legislative agenda, Fisher called for a comprehensive revamping of traditional policies to alleviate hunger. "Food security represents a community need, rather than an individual's plight," Fisher wrote. And reorienting the U.S. food economy toward communities, he insisted, begins with a systemic analysis incorporating issues such as food-industry consolidation, supermarket redlining and excessive reliance on transportation of processed commodity crops.

Fisher's proposals for long-term, community-driven food security programs caught on quickly. "It was an issue that was ripe to happen," says Gottlieb. At a 1994 conference in Chicago co-sponsored by the Hartford Food System and UCLA's Pollution Prevention Education and Research Center, Fisher's policy paper sparked interest in organizing a national movement. "It was really quite amazing," Gottlieb recalls. The movement, he says, "came out of an effort that didn't have much history." Thirty organizations, representing groups as disparate as small farmers and food-bank operators, policy researchers and environmentalists, attended the conference. As they discussed their local pilot efforts, Winne says, "there was a fairly spontaneous recognition of mutual interest."

It's a daunting challenge, but food-security programs across the country are building essential links in local food networks, creating personal as well as economic relationships among small rural and urban farmers, food banks, soup



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kitchens and low-income communities. Many are giving a new twist to some old models such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), arrangements in which communities fund local farmers in exchange for a season's worth of crops. In Los Angeles, starting this October, the Southland Farmers' Market and UCLA will run a CSA project that delivers fresh farm produce weekly to low-income neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, in the heart of Eastside, the most impoverished neighborhood in Austin, Texas, activists have set up a thriving community garden and farmers' market in a previously unused vacant lot. More than 40 percent of Eastside's families live below the poverty line, hunger and nutrition problems are widespread, and the supermarkets are few. The community garden serves as a hub for nutrition education for families and grows enough produce to provide each resident with one vegetable or piece of fruit every day of the year. Every weekend the Eastside Community Farmers' Market sets up shop alongside the neighborhood garden, featuring more than 20 local farmers, many of them certified organic growers.

Food-security activists are also forging ties between local farmers and mid-sized food services in schools and group homes. A pilot project in Oakland, Calif., is attempting to bring the produce of small farmers to food banks and residential rehabilitation centers. The Alameda County Community Food Bank acts as a temporary go-between, brokering produce sales from local farmers to food-service managers. The goal is to create new markets for small farmers and to improve nutrition. Leslie Mikkelsen, a nutritionist who is spearheading the project, says the approach works "if you can get some big programs on board and can bring the prices down without shafting the farmers."

The challenge, says Mikkelsen, is that small farmers can't provide the variety and volume of produce that these centers have come to expect year-round. Large-scale food servers generally seek a premium of convenience at the lowest possible cost, and they typically follow menus of canned and frozen food (and very little fresh produce) provided by major distributors, such as Allied Sysco. "The fact that one farmer does not grow everything that people need is going

to be a real barrier," Mikkelsen says.

The food-security movement has its sights set far beyond the five-year lifespan of the CFSA. In the process of campaigning for the bill, organizers have established national information-sharing networks and reinvigorated attempts to establish municipal food policy councils. In Austin and other cities, these councils are linking food security and access to reliable transportation, creating special food shopping bus routes serving low-income consumers.

A visit to SLUG's Alemany farm confirms that communities long neglected by the U.S. food economy are already working to procure their own food and fiber. Yet it is equally clear that grass-roots groups by themselves lack the time and resources to challenge the daunting inequities of the national food system. In a first small step, the CFSA gives these groups a toehold on this shaky economic ground.

With the attention—for now, at least—of national policy-makers, the community food-security movement is building a broad-based constituency. At a time when progressives are increasingly backed into a corner, the CFSA has helped to reclaim the terms of debate over the role of government. As Gottlieb explains, it provides "a language that puts together environmental protection, economic development and the needs of the poor."

Christopher Cook is a freelance journalist based in San Francisco. John Rodgers is a researcher at the Center for Healthcare Evaluation in Menlo Park, Calif.

## DSA Events in Washington, DC

**Cornel West, Barbara Ehrenreich, Clarence Lusane, Mari Matsudo, Roland Roebuck,** and others speak on "Building Multi-Racial Alliances for Economic and Social Justice" on Friday, November 10, 7:30 p.m., First Congregational Church, 10th & G Sts NW.

**Dorothy Healey, Richard Healey, and Carmen Mitchell** consider "Surviving in the 90's: Three generations of Social Activism" on Saturday, November 11, 8:00 p.m., Ohio Room, National 4-H Center, 7100 Connecticut Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD. With reception and live music. \$5 low income/\$10 regular/\$25 sponsor.

Both events are sponsored by the DC/MD/NoVA local Democratic Socialists of America in conjunction with the DSA National Convention in Washington, DC. Info: 202/483-3299 or 202/829-6155.

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# Unbalanced economics

By Richard B. Du Boff

**N**ewt Gingrich was asked recently whether his drive to eliminate federal deficits by slashing government spending might increase the risk of recession. Alluding to an axiom of classical economics, the House Speaker suggested that a private enterprise system can generate full employment and economic stability without government intervention. "If the market really does believe that we are going to balance the budget," Gingrich said, "the drop in long-term bond [rates] will more than offset the loss of fiscal stimulus." Commenting editorially on Gingrich's vision, *Business Week* added that "once the markets are convinced of the surety of fiscal discipline, the gains will come fast and furious. ... The payoff is huge."

Here's how the payoff is supposed to work: Federal deficits swallow up private saving, namely that part of current income that households do not spend on goods and services but instead put in the bank where it becomes available for potential borrowers. As federal deficits shrink from year to year, less saving will flow into government bonds that finance the debt and more will become available for private business to use for investment. This increased supply of saving will, according to *Business Week*, push interest rates down "about two percentage points lower than they would otherwise be." Lower interest rates will then encourage business investment and lead to vigorous growth in incomes, jobs and exports.

In other words, whatever is saved will be invested, and

whatever that investment produces will be consumed. Lower interest rates will ensure that any further increases in saving will be absorbed by larger volumes of investment, guaranteeing continuity of economic growth.

It's as though John Maynard Keynes never lived. Yet the message has been picked up and uncritically transmitted, in terms much like *Business Week's*, by media voices across the land. *The Philadelphia Inquirer's* R.A. Zaldivar, for example, writes that "to understand why the pain of balancing the federal budget might just be worth it, picture a baby girl. With a balanced budget, as the baby grows, her parents would be able to finance a home, their cars and her college education all at interest rates lower than today's. That's because less government borrowing would mean less demand for loans." Even a Democrat like Brookings Institution fellow and former Congressional Budget Office Director Robert

Reischauer has joined the ranks of the believers. "In the very short run the fiscal restraint [from lower deficits] could prove to be a small drag on the economy," Reischauer recently conceded. But, he added, lower interest rates will eventually prevail: "The increased investment that will result from higher national saving will increase the nation's economic potential. As a result, the economy five to 10 years from now will be stronger and larger than otherwise would be the case."

The idea that virtually any amount of investment will be forthcoming if only we can get interest rates low enough is belied by experience. Business responded weakly to the repeated interest rate cuts of 1933-37; outlays on plant and equipment recovered slowly and by the end of the decade had still not returned to the level they had reached in 1930, the first full year of the Great Depression. Another example is 1981-86, when interest rates fell steadily but business investment grew at a tepid rate of 1.9 percent per year—and this during the peak years of the second longest economic expansion in U.S. history. And in 1992, at the end of a two-year period that saw 14 short-term interest rate cuts and retreating long-term rates, real business investment was 4 percent below its 1990 level.

These case histories indicate that, at best, the stimulative effect of any interest rate reductions is less robust, and less predictable, than that of changes in government spending or tax rates. They appear to support the darker conclusions of many economists over the years, most recently Washington University's Steven Fazzari, who finds that private business

*The GOP's  
mania for a  
balanced budget  
ignores serious  
pitfalls for the  
American  
economy.*

investment is “quite unresponsive to interest rates” and instead is driven by sales growth and cash flow—in other words, by expectations of high profitability.

The economic history of the 1980s also suggests that there is no strong causal relation between federal deficits and interest rates. While federal deficits were exploding in the wake of Reagan’s 1981-83 tax cuts, interest rates headed sharply lower. Here, too, the lesson seems clear: Large deficits probably have some effect on interest rates, but that effect is small. Interest rates in the United States and other high-income nations are basically determined by central banks like the Federal Reserve and not by the level of government borrowing. Throughout the 1980s, large deficits coexisted with generally declining interest rates and sluggish corporate investment. Any remaining possibility that the deficits “crowded out” private investment collapses in the face of an additional fact: During these years corporate America had no trouble finding hundreds of billions of dollars for mergers, buyouts and the highest executive pay scale in the world.

Indeed, without the stimulative effect of the deficits on economic activity, the expansion of the 1980s would undoubtedly have petered out well before the recession of 1990-1991. As James Savage noted in his 1988 book *Balanced Budgets & American Politics*, “The economy’s astonishing capacity to accommodate the federal government’s deficit spending overwhelms the position that balanced budgets are required for a healthy economy.”

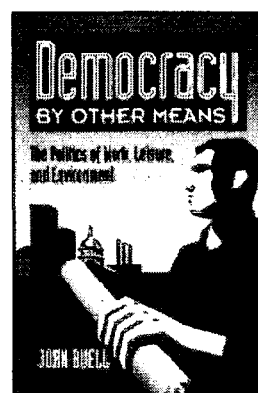
The most likely effect of balancing the budget by the year 2002 will be to brake an economy that has long exhibited a tendency to operate below its potential and to reach full employment only under exceptional circumstances. Recessions, or more likely stagnation, will recur, as withdrawal of federal fiscal support for the economy outweighs any stimulus from lower interest rates. These depressive effects will be intensified by block-grant proposals that will shift Medicaid and other costs to the states, which are ill-prepared to assume fiscal burdens handed down from a shrinking federal government. Governors everywhere are likely to react by cutting other programs and opting for various back-door tax increases.

As worrisome as these long-run implications of budget balancing may be, the shorter-term effects may be more dangerous. The “automatic stabilizers” that make swings in the business cycle less severe—such as government relief programs and progressive income tax scales—have been targeted for cutbacks and, in some cases, elimination. But the cushioning effect these stabilizers provide is crucial. During recessions, outlays automatically rise for unemployment compensation, food stamps and welfare assistance; simultaneously, as incomes fall, so do individual income tax payments, as people drop into lower tax brackets or lose their incomes altogether. Deficits rise, but more spending power is pumped into the economy, helping to stem the recession before it turns into something far worse.

Combined with high levels of spending by federal, state and local governments, the automatic stabilizers have accounted for the greater stability of the economy since the Second World War—precisely the era of “big government” so detested by the Republican majority. For example, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury (and Harvard economist) Bradford DeLong estimates that without the automatic stabilizers the 1990-91 recession would have been more severe: National income would have fallen 37 percent more than it actually did. A complementary estimate by Yale’s Ray Fair is that for every \$10 billion decline in national income during a recession, the federal deficit rises by \$2 billion, as the stabilizers trigger higher spending and lower tax collections. These figures would be bigger were it not for the cuts in unemployment compensation and welfare programs made during the Reagan years. And now they will be even smaller, thanks to Armev, Archer, Gramm and company.

The era of “small government” ended not with a whimper but with a bang in 1929. Of course, history does not repeat itself chapter and verse, but this may be the scariest prospect of all—the thought that free-market capitalism, in its stage of unregulated global finance, is preparing new calamities for us, the dimensions of which we cannot imagine and against which we will have fewer tools to protect ourselves.

Richard B. Du Boff is a professor of economics at Bryn Mawr College.



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JOHN BUELL

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# I N T H E A R T S

## Good vibrations

**A revealing  
look at the  
world's first  
electronic  
musical  
instrument and  
its inventor.**

By Pat Dowell

S

teven M. Martin's feature-length documentary *Theremin—an Electronic Odyssey* is full of astonishing history about the development of the theremin, the world's first electronic musical instrument. But it tells an even more gripping story about its eponymous inventor, Leon Theremin. A Russian scientist who settled in New York in the 1920s, Theremin had a mind unfettered by the limits of the present, seeing in the infant technology of electronics implications for every facet of human experience—from the arts to the police state. He invented a security system for Sing Sing prison, fooled around with television and devised several instruments that heralded the electronic revolution in music. The theremin was the most fantastic of these. It looks like a lectern with metal antennas on either side. The

player touches only the air between the metal rods, and the sound generated has an inhuman smoothness that has been called both celestial and demonic. If you've ever seen *The Day the Earth Stood Still* or listened to the Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations," you've heard a theremin.

The movie chronicles the theremin's cultural progress from classical instrument to movie sound effect to rock 'n' roll novelty—from Carnegie Hall to the Bijou to the Fillmore. And the movie tells of the mysterious Leon Theremin himself, who became the toast of New York just as the Depression struck, and then disappeared overnight in 1938, apparently repatriated against his will by Stalin's operatives. The reasons for Theremin's sudden departure remain obscure, but Stalin probably thought the man the newspapers called the Soviet Edison would be useful in the coming war.

There is something of the dapper mad scientist about Leon Theremin. In newspaper clippings from the 1920s, he stands thin and tuxedoed, a William Powell of the scientific set, making "music from the air" at Carnegie Hall and other high-toned venues. His protégée, Clara Rockmore, is a formidable presence in her own right. Now, she is an imperious dowager and keeper of the flame, for both the instrument and the man; then, she was a beautiful young woman of utmost seriousness, looking every inch the high priestess of an austere cult. She stands before the featureless cabinet of her theremin—which has the appearance of a small altar—with an art-deco, diamond-shaped speaker looming behind her.

They were more than just master and student, the film suggests, and it's obvious that Theremin doted on Rockmore. He constructed a cake for her 18th birthday that, as shown in home movies, lights up and begins to rotate when she walks up to it. They were smitten, but each ended up marrying someone else. Theremin, with typical futuristic disdain for what was considered possible or proper at the time, married an African-American ballerina. Many of his society friends immediately shunned him.

Rockmore was a virtuoso violinist who thought the theremin was a modern concert instrument, and she toured with Paul Robeson, played with Leopold Stokowski and mastered an impressive repertoire that included a bracing concerto for her written by Anise Fuliehan, a little of which is heard in the film. "I just wanted to play Bach," she insists, complaining about Hollywood's transformation of the theremin into a spook-show novelty heralding spaceships or insanity.

The movie doesn't say so, but you can't help wondering if the chief reason for that development was because nobody else devoted a life to mastering the theremin the way Clara



**Theremin** Rockmore did. In movies, the  
Directed by Steven M. Martin theremin is used for a few  
phrases of wobbly, weird

“woo-woo,” but Rockmore, as heard in the film in concert (and on a wonderful CD, *The Art of the Theremin*), turns it into a kind of super-violin that produces a sound resembling the cello and the human voice, able to leap four and a half octaves in a single gesture. It looks easy to play, though apparently it's not, and what Rockmore can do with it is unbelievably beautiful.

There's something touchingly anachronistic about the classical purity she demands of the world's first electronic musical instrument. But one expects the new technology to demand a new music, not recapitulate the old (no matter how lovely it sounds when doing so). Hollywood, in its own bumbling blend of the old and new, actually recognized something essential about the theremin—that it could express both what was impossibly new and what was timelessly ineffable: monsters from space and from the id. In *Spellbound*, it charted the uncertain wanderings of Gregory Peck's traumatized psyche. In *It Came from Outer Space*, the theremin started up whenever we perceived earthlings

through an extraterrestrial's watery eye. It was Hollywood's use of the theremin that caught the imagination of rock musicians such as Brian Wilson, who memorably incorporated its sounds into “Good Vibrations.” Martin caught the psychologically volatile Wilson on a good day, and includes a slightly fractured but still inspired interview, in which Wilson relates how scary he found the theremin's sound as a child, describing it as “almost sexual.”

The theremin seems now like one of those antiquated relics of the future as seen by generations past, but it was a milestone in music and technology. In Martin's film, musicologist and composer Nicolas Slonimski says he saw Theremin as “the prophet of the future of music.” Robert Moog, the inventor of the Moog synthesizer, calls the theremin “the biggest, fattest cornerstone of electronic music,” and he relates how he built one from a magazine article when he was 14 years old. The theremin led him directly to the synthesizer, he says. In fact, Moog currently has a company that builds and sells theremins (they start at \$2,500).

And what of Theremin the man? In what is surely the most amazing twist in a constantly surprising film, Martin hunts him down in Moscow and finds a wizened little elf in his 90s, pattering around an invention-crammed flat. He can hardly remember a word of English. Through interviews with

Theremin's relatives, Martin establishes the inventor's heart-breaking burial under the weight of Soviet history. A prisoner for seven years in Mogodan, the infamous Siberian gulag, on a charge no one can now recall, Theremin was eventually ensconced in a KGB prison, where he invented—can you believe it?—“the bug,” or miniaturized listening device. That got him the Stalin Prize and release from jail (as well as earning him an unheralded, if indirect, role in the eventual downfall of the Nixon administration). He continued to live in Moscow, working on minor projects until he died in 1993, shortly after Martin completed filming.

Martin closes his film with Theremin's return to the United States for an award ceremony at Stanford University attended by many of those who expanded his legacy in electronic and computer music. And finally, too, Theremin meets up again with Clara Rockmore. One of the pleasures of Martin's film is the way wonderful, energetic old people—Slonimski, former “thereminist,” as the players were called, and other artists—keep popping up to share their undiminished zest for life. But the cappers are Rockmore and Theremin himself. Seeing them together in the closing moments of the film, to the strains of “Good Vibrations,” is a delight that few other films can match.

# IN PRINT

## The politics of healthy-mindedness

By Catherine Tumber

**Y**ou will know that you are in community," announces John McKnight toward the end of *The Careless Society*, "when you often hear laughter and singing." It is no coincidence that Meta Mendel-Reyes concludes her paean to community, *Reclaiming Democracy*, with another homily to choral delight: "Through participation, we share a movement culture of preparing meals together, of telling stories, of singing great songs..."

What is it about the effort to reclaim participatory democracy that puts a song in so many hearts, particularly among the "new populists" of the left?

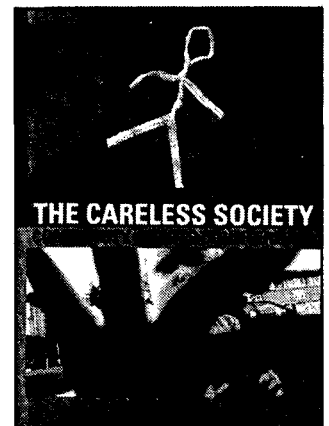
New populists of the right view workers and corporate managers as horny-handed producers whose honest labor is continually thwarted by the demands of liberal "big government." But leftish new populists tend to keep their eyes trained on corporate America (the latter-day plutocrats) as the culprit behind modern America's decline. And they are correspondingly attentive to how massive political and economic realignments play out in the small communities and neighborhoods that are, in their view, the proper domain for citizen action.

The sweet strains of community seem increasingly inviting as an impersonal global economy grows larger and larger, and multinational corporations steadily evade the sovereignty of nation states. In the American service economy, the workforce is increasingly conscripted into nonproductive labor and meaningless McJobs. Income is becoming grossly stratified, while humanistic education and folk wisdom—once held vital to the health of democratic citizenship—have been rendered superfluous. Above all, the service economy is invasive: having systematically dismantled the structure and ethos of local control and individual responsibility, it has rendered us dependent on self-interested professionals and experts, who are desperately trying to acquire and preserve a foothold in the new order. This cohort of service workers typically offers medical and emotional therapy,

criminal justice services, and assistance for the elderly, disabled and economically disadvantaged—all noble endeavors in their own way, but together they form what John McKnight terms the "counterfeit" of community.

In *The Careless Society*, McKnight, director of the Community Studies Program at the Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research at Northwestern University, argues passionately for replacing human services professionalism with an ethic of community-based care. The book opens with a thoughtful, even stirring, essay comparing the rapid soil depletion caused by the introduction of the steel plow in the 1830s with the way the new field of "bereavement counseling" erodes a community's ability to grieve its losses. Following Ivan Illich, McKnight extends the concept of "iatrogenesis"—doctor-created disease—to fields such as social work, education and criminal justice. But McKnight is not out to abolish the therapeutic ethos of professional caregivers; instead, he wants to see it dispersed more widely among the lay members of their client communities and to call the result "democratic citizenship." Indeed, he argues that the *central* function of community life is giving "care." This is where the trouble starts. McKnight defines care as "the manifestation of community life," but also argues that it is something more: "It is the ability of citizens to care that creates strong communities and able democracies." McKnight is surely on the mark to argue that this "ability" has been ravaged by human services professionals who view their work in apolitical terms, cloaking their real interests in a "mask of care" and a self-deceiving rhetoric of "love." But it is quite another thing for him to insist that the central challenge of democratic citizenship is therefore to restore "caring" to its appropriate "site" within the community.

While "recommunalizing" people is undeniably a good thing, it does not help us to mete out justice, to evaluate individual and social character, or to discriminate between rival moral and aesthetic claims. A specifically moral community requires civil restraint, the habit of forgiveness, a sense of how astonishingly sad life can be in spite of our best efforts—qualities that come into being only when we take the long view provid-



**The Careless Society:  
Community and  
Its Counterfeits**  
By John McKnight  
BasicBooks  
194 pp., \$21

**Reclaiming Democracy:  
The Sixties in Politics  
and Memory**  
By Meta Mendel-Reyes  
Routledge  
205 pp., \$19.95



ed by religion and a shrewd sense of history. But McKnight could not possibly derive moral insight from either history or religion because he takes as facile a view of them as he does of "community." McKnight's one stab at historical analysis (or is it anthropological? he's not sure) is positively embarrassing. Black men, he ventures, are being incarcerated and executed in disproportionate numbers because, among other reasons, they are being offered as mythic blood sacrifices, just as the ancient Mayans sacrificed their most desirable virgins and (ready for this one?) the Nazis "sacrificed" the Jews.

McKnight dispenses with religion just as witlessly—and this is particularly egregious, since "caring" arguably lies more within the domain of religion than in politics. To be in community, he tells us, is to have "explicit common knowledge of tragedy, death, and suffering," and as an antidote to these, to engage in "ritual, lamentation, and celebration of our fallibility." This sort of community spiritualization by fiat may help us to reckon with garden-variety pain, but it takes more than this to come to terms with the sheer obduracy of the tragic. All the scourges that can beset humanity usually introduce themselves to individuals, however well communalized, who must therefore spend their lives cultivating the inner courage and faith without which "ritual" is a series of empty gestures. Yet the cultivation of inner spiritual discipline, which has a great deal to do with "caring," not to mention democratic practice, receives none of McKnight's attention. Besides, worshipful gratitude to the creator is one thing; celebration of his decision to make me and my loved ones fallible strikes me as disingenuous.

Such uncritical outbursts reveal an unpleasant streak of condescension in the rhetoric of community. For all of his criticism of the service economy and what it has wrought, McKnight is taken in by the ideology of health, which is the stock in trade of the human services professions. Nor has he fully divested himself of the patronizing attitude of the expert—an affliction he shares with those (including our president) who abjure brave political judgment for public policy analysis mingled with cloying emotionalism. In the end, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that McKnight has not shaken off the thinly conceived identity politics that has beleaguered the Democratic Party's left wing for 25 years. Therefore, he does not speak of rejuvenating the civic traditions of all Americans. Rather, he seeks to "empower" such

"labeled people" as the variously disabled, "people called children," people in that stage of the life cycle he calls "oldhood," those who suffer racial discrimination and poverty. But ridding our society of the genuine afflictions invoked in this jargon—injustices that are largely the work of the corporate market—will take more than reminding ourselves that "most time-tested healing rites convene community, draw power from the earth, and call on the spirit of the afflicted."

But if meaningful democratic practice cannot be collectively cared into existence, how can it be recovered? In *Reclaiming Democracy*, Meta Mendel-Reyes offers one, not very helpful, suggestion. It is that we as a people stop viewing the social movements of '60s in a "negative" light and start viewing the decade in a more "positive" one. Seduced by the invasion of literary criticism into the practice of historical analysis, Mendel-Reyes argues that "the '60s" is a "metaphor" for participatory politics. The trouble with this approach is that, as she acknowledges, much more hap-

pened in the '60s than the laudable rediscovery of participatory democracy—and much of it was "negative." If "the '60s" function as a metaphor at all, it is with reference to its latter, dismal years when the ideal of participatory democracy was in abeyance, and even to the first, yet more dismal, years of the '70s.

Metaphor aside, Mendel-Reyes, a political science professor and director of the Democracy Project at Swarthmore College, seeks to offer a historical interpretation of the '60s

from which we can retrieve democratic practices for use in the '90s. If McKnight provides us a sense of the ethos of New Populism as one of "care" and the quest for "empowerment," Mendel-Reyes rehearses its underlying historical narrative. Beginning with the old Populists of the 1890s, whom she credits with resuscitating the ideal of localized civic action laid down by the antifederalists, she briskly follows the participatory thread through the sit-down strikes of the 1930s to the civil rights movement and the early, halcyon days of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Mendel does not make clear, however, what, if any, historical continuity might link these movements. This kind of analysis might have deepened our understanding of the transmission of civic ideas and habits to new generations and the role memory plays in the process. In any case, we now come to the heart of her story. She recounts the rise of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating



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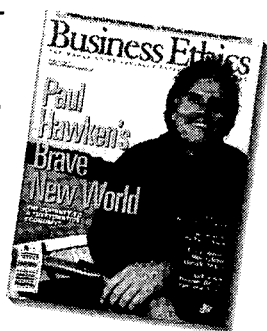
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Committee, the SDS, and the SDS' Economic Research and Action Project, and offers the by now well-rehearsed litany of reasons for their demise: the manipulative style of their leaders, the intractable difficulty of organizing in the urban north, the Black Power movement's rejection of whites and so on.

But having done that, Mendel-Reyes now seems to enter a cognitive Bermuda Triangle. Conceding that the social movements of the late '60s and early '70s failed to live up to their original promise, she now wants to persuade us that the moral idealism and participatory democracy of the early '60s not only survived the splintering of the New Left, the attack on Dr. King by Black Power advocates, the rise of women's and gay liberation, and the wholesale rejection of the New Left by workers, but has lived on in the "feminist, gay and lesbian, environmental, and peace movements of the '70s and '80s" of which she was a part.

This controversial assertion goes completely unargued. Indeed, Mendel-Reyes glosses over the specific cultural modes in which the sensibility of the '60s has lingered on. And it was precisely the peculiarly '60s brand of cultural radicalism that the social movements of the '70s and '80s inherited: the elevation of liberation over all other political values, the wholesale repudiation of the middle classes, the blurring of public and private spheres, and the replication of liberal interest group politics in the form of a therapeutic identity politics. These characteristics, and not the neglected ideal of "participatory politics," account for cultural radicalism's diminished appeal for a wide variety of sensible, civic-minded Americans, who long to participate meaningfully in our fragile and increasingly endangered democracy.

Like so many of their fellow communitarian critics of liberalism, both McKnight and Mendel-Reyes presume a link between community and civic action—and it is entirely appropriate that they should. But all too often they allow civic culture to stand in for a static, harmonious vision of democracy. Whatever else it is, democratic culture thrives on disputatiousness and dissent. These qualities depend, in turn, on observing the distinction between public and private, as well as the manners of civility that should govern public deliberation. A more compelling participatory politics must not only address the very real and disheartening inequities between classes, races and genders. It must also take seriously questions of how civic participation draws from and develops character, judgment, and even taste, if democracy is to be preferred over, say, Stalinism as a way of tempering the gross inequities wrought by the corporate market.

Of course, such considerations carry little weight with those new populists who refuse to shed the ideological baggage of '60s cultural radicalism. Admittedly, there is much to be said for the new populism—especially since it may offer our only hope for countering the predations of the global corporate market. But it is because so much is at stake that we will have to do much better than this.

Catherine Tumber is associate editor of the Howard Thurman Papers Project and teaches history at Syracuse University.

# Victorian secrets

By David Futrelle

Until recently, "Victorian" was as reliable a political insult as the old standby, "Puritan." The two terms conjured up similar images: stuffy moralists in uncomfortable clothes imposing the strictures of their narrow minds upon the world, with all the usual, distasteful accouterments: stern lectures on the dangers of sexual excess and chaste Christian homilies meant to combat impure thoughts.

But in recent years—as vague talk of "values" has come close to driving out the last remnants of substance in our political discourse—a few have tried to revive the fortunes of the Victorians, to remove the stain of insult from the term. More than a decade ago, Margaret Thatcher (ahead of the pack by being far behind it), told an interviewer that she jolly well did like the old "Victorian values"—by which she meant a grab-bag of old-fashioned virtues ranging from patriotism to personal hygiene. More recently, and more typically, free-lance moralist and *Book of Virtues* compiler William Bennett has argued that "the Victorians provide an admirable counter-example to our current malaise," by which he meant a rebuttal to the excesses of the '60s and beyond.

But there is one little facet of the Victorian ideal that doesn't seem to make it into anyone's book of virtues. For Victorians are known not only for their virtues but for their vices—in particular, the vice of hypocrisy. Despite their protestations of extreme morality, the Victorians seem to have been (at least behind closed doors) almost extravagantly naughty. Or at least the men were: Widely known to be patrons of prostitutes and thus the source of the lively "white slave" trade so often denounced in the broadsheets of the day, they were also collectors of pornographic photos and novels—with titles ranging from *Confessions of a Footman* to *The Lustful Turk*—heavy on flagellation, fetishism and incest. Generally, those most interested in reviving Victorianism don't talk much about the sex-obsessed "other Victorians." But in *When Passion Reigned*, historian Patricia Anderson celebrates the Victorians not in spite of, but largely because of, their legendary naughtiness. It's not that Anderson's book—a short, and somewhat glib, revisionist history of Victorian sexuality—celebrates the aggressive, eccentric perversity of the Lustful Turk and his Western colleagues. She prefers the blushing beauty of the proper Victorian lady whose eyes linger a little too long on the tight trousers of her beau, the sublimated sexuality of the bustle and the corset. Her vision of Victorianism sits somewhere between William Bennett and the Victoria's Secret catalog: She finds repression rather titillating.

Anderson much prefers the demure, euphemistic Victorians to those today who, as she puts it, "withdraw, all but disembodied, into the ether of clinical language and immoderate talk." Indeed, she seems to believe that to talk too much of sex is to rob it of meaning; it's better to leave things unspoken—or spoken of indirectly, as seen through a gauze of euphemism. "Knowing little of the graphicness of pornography and the clinic, the Victorians cultivated the nuanced words of romance and the language of gestures, blushes and telling glances," she concludes (having evidently forgotten the lively pornographic trade she described on previous pages). "Cherishing the sensual yet nurturing the intangible, they enjoyed the fullness of passion." Beyond the thesis itself, very little of Anderson's slender book comes as much of a surprise.

She spends most of her time examining popular culture for evidence of sexual undertones; as one might expect, these are not hard to find. She discovers that Victorians thought a great deal about sex; that Victorian men had a certain fetishistic love of corsets and "heaving bosoms"; that men took lustful peeks at whatever parts of the female were deliberately or inadvertently exposed; that women watched men swimming in the buff with more than purely anatomical interest.

Yet Anderson rarely stops to consider what Victorian sexuality might have meant to ordinary Victorians; she is content to project her own assumptions on the people of the age, and to assume that they shared her passionate love of euphemistic innuendo and discreet ardor, that the absence of explicit public talk about sexuality is somehow proof that real passion reigned in the privacy of the bedroom. (Anderson cites Foucault as her source for her discomfort with the modern habit of transforming "sex into talk," but the connection seems forced; she doesn't mind sex talk so long as it is flowery and private.) But very little in the history of sexuality suggests that evasiveness and euphemism is the best way to enhance sexual pleasures.

Indeed, alongside the happy few who derived titillating benefits from Victorian secrecy, there were plenty who found themselves left out of this utopia of discreet passion. Anderson at least mentions them: women who did not find fulfillment, sexual or otherwise, in marriage; repressed spinsters; men "too shy" to get themselves married. But even in examining the worms in the apple, she cannot hide her innate optimism. Those "excluded" from the happy cen-



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ter of the Victorian “sexual world” could take a certain comfort in the era’s passion for euphemism. “[T]he Victorian sexual mystique offered what a later era’s explicitness would increasingly withhold,” she writes. “For the unhappily married, the jilted and the lonely, there was leeway for the romantic imagination. In an age of discreet sexual expression, there was no little gratification to be taken from an approving glance, a small act of kindness, or a few appreciative words from a member of the opposite sex.”

This is, I think, a remarkable statement—and not only for its assumption that the “unhappily married, the jilted and the lonely” were the only ones excluded or otherwise harmed by the rigidities of the Victorian sexual code. But why should we expect a glance, or even “a few appreciative words,” to suffice for anyone? Anderson seems to feel that it would have been inappropriate, even tacky, for those left out to have made a fuss; they simply should have made do. She does have a point: Had they really craved release, they could have always (if they were men) gone to a prostitute, or snuck to a darkened corner of the house to read about flagellation and engage in some guilt-ridden “self-abuse.”

Lucy Bland’s *Banishing the Beast* is a useful antidote to Anderson’s facile brand of romanticism. At the center of the book—an informative, if sometimes disorderly, examination of the sexual ideologies of Victorian feminists—is something called the “Men and Women’s Club,” a kind of Victorian consciousness-raising group. The group, made up of a dozen or so radical intellectuals of both sexes (the most famous of the bunch being writer Olive Schreiner), met regularly in London in the 1880s to talk, as frankly and openly as possible, about sex.

From the discussions of this group, as well as from a broader examination of the popular press and scholarly works of the day, Bland (who teaches women’s studies at the University of North London) pieces together a complex and nuanced picture of the ways in which Victorian feminists both embodied and challenged the sexual myths of their time. The myths themselves were not without their own contradictions. Most scientific and medical commentators of the day regarded woman as more or less asexual beings; as psychologist Charles Mercier put it, “the impulse towards sexual intercourse is in the great majority of women but slight.” But a few disagreed. Dr. T.L. Nichols, for example, described the healthy woman as being “full of ardour, [with] a great capacity for enjoyment ... seldom satisfied with a single sexual act.”

Feminists disagreed not only as to which was the correct view, but on the political implications of their disagreements. Some feminists argued that women’s very lack of desire gave them the right to engage in politics. “Women’s supposed lack of carnality was the cornerstone of the argument for women’s moral superiority,” Bland writes. “The idea of women as ‘moral protectors of the home,’ while ideologically contributing further to women’s domestic confinement, simultaneously gave women a sense of mission,

spiritual worth, and strong incentive to engage in philanthropic works—to morally protect others’ ... homes.”

The “others” in question were generally, as Bland makes clear, working-class women—particularly prostitutes, who became the frequent target of feminist-led purity campaigns. Of course, the prostitutes themselves often had quite different ideas about the matter, and moral reformers were constantly running across supposed victims of prostitution who “showed no inclination to leave their sinful life,” as one account put it. In the midst of an 1877 anti-prostitution campaign, representatives of the National Vigilance Association burst into a house of ill repute. “[O]ne of the girls was handed over to the rescuers of her own sex, to be entreated, reasoned, coaxed ... into giving up the life that meant her ruin,” Laura Ormiston Chant reported in the *Vigilance Record*. “She ... obstinately reiterated her wish to live the life she’d chosen ‘of my own free will.’”

The parallel with contemporary antipornography feminism could not be more clear. The vigilant Victorians had great faith in the power of clean thinking: Through proper education, as one 1895 birth control booklet explained, the “voice of lower passion will be overcome by the higher pleadings of justice.” It was simply a question of willing lust away, much as some antiporn activists in the men’s movement urge men to will away the desire for pornography. According to Kate Mills, a Victorian advocate of chastity for all: “[A]s you think, so you are ... let lustfulness be considered natural and it will soon become prevalent.”

Meanwhile, others among the feminists warned of the dangers of repression. In an 1897 lecture, feminist Josephine Butler cautioned against overzealous vigilance vigilantes. Moral crusades, she suggested, had a tendency to exaggerate regressive notions of female innocence and male vice—and thus undermine the feminist claim for equality. And they were, by necessity, coercive endeavors. “Beware of ‘Purity Societies’ ... ready to accept and endorse any amount of inequality in the laws, any amount of coercive and degrading treatment of their fellow creatures,” Butler warned, “in the fatuous belief that you can oblige human beings to be moral by *force*.” But even the Butlerites couldn’t always heed their own advice, at times falling back on coercive strategies to control the sexual behavior of young girls.

It was not simply an inborn sense of propriety that led Victorian women and men to adopt the genteel modesty Anderson’s book so uncritically celebrates: Bland’s book reveals the crude coercion that underlay much of what Anderson calls the Victorian era’s “sexual mystique.” One can understand Anderson’s desire to step back from the crude sexual cheerleading that conflates erotic exposure and political liberation. But it is dangerous to elevate sexual unease to a kind of virtue. Those who will not (or cannot) talk openly about sex are bound to obsess about it—and some of them, like the Purity Societies in the 19th century and the Catharine MacKinnons of today, are likely to try to impose their own obsessions on the rest of us. ◀

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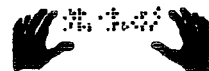
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*Continued from page 40*

great time. Did she change her view of hitchhiking? No. She's just as terrified.

But some people seemed inspired, and I didn't want to let them down. I went back to the bet again. It was easy, ordinary, just another chore. I was sleeping on the sidewalks of East Oakland and South-Central L.A. with \$500 in my pocket, standing along highways like, "Could one of you serial killers please pick me up? I have a 7 p.m. appointment." It wasn't that I overcame my fear—it was just crowded out by evidence.

*Easy for you to say. You're not black. You're not a woman!*

I don't know what to say to women. I know what to say to men about raping women, but what can I say to women? I know a Colombian girl from Queens who ran away from home and hitchhiked to California when she was 16, no problem. I also met a black woman from D.C. who almost got raped and killed hitchhiking to New York.

On the other side of the steering wheel I have rough demographics: Females by themselves (one in 10 rides) picked me up more often than couples (one in 50), and truck drivers (one in 100). But when I went to Wyoming and back with Gin, a blond woman, most of our rides were from couples and trucks! Blacks picked me up about once every 40 rides. Both ex-convicts (one in 10) and self-made millionaires (one in 50) tended to pick me up in numbers greater than their share of the population. In Camden, N.J., I got a ride from a black, ex-convict, self-made millionaire in a Jaguar whose brother had been murdered by a stranger only two months before. He picked up a white boy by the side of the road because "you looked like you needed a ride."

My friend Aduni, who is a black woman, was going to come with me to the West Coast, but she had to stay home because of money problems. My friend Matt came along to Minneapolis. Matt is "a brotha"—apparently, he's a "fine brotha" too; we got one in three rides from females, including 28-year-old Ren, the editor of *Afterimage* film magazine. Two other women with their children pulled over to give us a ride. And a petite medical technician from China picked us up in a luxury car.

"Aren't you afraid to pick up strangers? Don't you watch American TV?" I heard myself ask her.

"You can't live like that," she said. "If I was on the side of the road I would want you to stop for me." I thought of all the men who wouldn't stop to let us hop in their pickup trucks.

At a book reading in San Francisco, I was challenged "not to go" to Hunter's Point (the largest black neighborhood in the city). A tough white guy named Mike (former graffiti writer in training to be a cop) offered to give me a tour of San Francisco, then drop me off in Hunter's Point. "Just don't go to Sunnydale," he added.

Sunnydale?

"Don't go there!" emphasized a black woman. "It's really not worth it. You won't be able to do anybody any good

if you get killed. The ghetto in San Francisco is not like on the East Coast. Black people here are so isolated. So in a way they're even angrier."

Everyone has a *reason* why *their* black people are *the* scariest.

Who wants to come with me? I asked.

It was Saturday night. A bunch of people standing around. No one said anything.

"I'll come," said a small, well-dressed young woman. She hadn't spoken all night. Everyone glanced at her nonchalantly then quickly looked away. Even her friends didn't say anything to her.

Her name was Lisa—from Newton, Mass., a student at Pomona College. She had never been to a ghetto before. Mike drove us to the far end of Sunnydale. It was midnight. He tried to convince us not to get out of the car.

Lisa and I walked in circles until 4 a.m. through Sunnydale, Hunter's Point and a couple of projects, all the way back to the Mission district.

"Get the fuck out of here!" someone shouted from a slow-moving van. We were on a dark side street. Lisa didn't flinch.

After a summer of interviews and bookstore appearances, Lisa went the furthest I've seen anyone go in curbing the Ghetto-Avoidance Pattern, among the least-talked-about gaps in American life. Our literature suffers from an analogous gap. We need a literature about being spoiled. Enough of this literature about struggle! Most people who read in this country are spoiled and boring, yet all they want to read about is struggle and adventure.

The only white people I know who realize it's safe to live in the ghetto are the ones who've actually lived there. A few other whites tell me that I'm wrong, naive, lucky, lying, crazy. At least they're up-front about it.

Most whites I meet are neither experienced nor up-front. They tell me that they agree with me, or they admire me, or they change their attitudes, or they change the subject. But who so far has changed their address?

Why should they? Every place I've lived or person I know well brings out a different side of me. My mother brings out one side. My father brings out another. The more kinds of people I know on their own terms, the more sides of my personality get developed. Any people I don't know, not only do I not know them; I don't even know that part of myself. Most people are walking around with less than half a personality.

People with underdeveloped personalities aren't really in a position to make informed choices in their personal lives, let alone figure out how to organize against racism or struggle for social justice. I don't care how long you've been reading *In These Times*. Or how astute you are when talking to like-minded buddies. Without friendship among disenfranchised groups, leftist organizing is impossible and leftist principles are empty. Social justice grows out of your social circle.

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